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THE HISTORY OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
AND THE WAR IN VIETNAM
1960 - 1968

PART II

HISTORICAL DIVISION
JOINT SECRETARIAT
JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
1 July 1970

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Chapter 17

THE US COMMITMENT GROWS

As 1965 began, it appeared that the US policy of furnishing only military equipment and counsel to nations threatened by the communists had failed in Vietnam as it had failed in Korea. The United States now faced squarely the choice of either entering more directly and at increased risk and cost into the war in Vietnam or, by inaction, of allowing the communists to prevail. In view of the growing support being furnished the insurgents by NVN, and the critical governmental weakness and waning military fortunes of the RVN, the necessity for a decision while choice was still possible grew more urgent each day. In the first months of the new year, the President, moved as much by events as by the various arguments of his several advisors, ordered stronger, more direct military, economic and political actions in Vietnam. Like the year 1962, in which President Kennedy had greatly increased US support of the RVN, 1965 was to mark a definite turning in the national policy toward Vietnam.

Signs of an Enemy Victory

At no time had the VC seemed so close to a decisive military victory over the RVN as in early 1965. The weakened and dispirited forces of the RVN were no match for the insurgents. In major battles, in patrol skirmishes, and in ambushes throughout the country the ARVN and its paramilitary cousins, the RF and the PF, consistently suffered costly and discouraging defeat at the hands of their highly motivated, more skillful enemy.

The VC made good use of their superiority, taking the initiative nearly everywhere in the RVN and closing LOCs almost at will. No longer were they restricting themselves to hit-and-run tactics. And there was good reason to believe that they might be shifting to a strategy of committing larger units against the ARVN in pitched battles. In early January, for example, in a fierce and protracted encounter around Binh Gia, forty miles southeast of Saigon, the VC inflicted heavy losses on the ARVN. US military intelligence

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experts believed that this battle might mark a turning point toward a more intense phase of the war.¹

As to VC strength, US intelligence authorities believed that the communists were now employing about 30,000 regular VC troops and from 60 to 80 thousand part-time guerrillas in RVN--an increase of from 8 to 10,000 regulars during 1964. This rise was considered remarkable in view of the high number of casualties, estimated at 21,000, that the VC had sustained. US experts judged that only a well-established, efficient military-political organization could sustain such losses and still be able to function with greater effectiveness than ever. The fact that the VC had professional command, logistics, communications, and personnel systems to support their specialized military tactics seemed to confirm that the VC were being directed from Hanoi. Captured documents, interrogation reports, and other sources of information showed that the broad guidance on policy, strategy, and doctrine flowed from the top governmental levels in Hanoi. The organization for insurgency which had, the United States believed, been planned in Hanoi was well suited both militarily and politically to its task.

Regular VC forces (main force units that had been identified in the RVN) comprised 5 regiments, 47 battalions, and 135 companies. Early in 1965, strong concentrations of these units were located in Quang Tin and Quang Ngai provinces in the northern I Corps Tactical Zone (CTZ). Regular VC units were thinly scattered throughout the central area in the II CTZ but again were heavily distributed in the III and IV CTZs north and south of Saigon. The irregular local guerrillas were most dense in this same southern area of the RVN.²

As of 1 January, COMUSMACV had no definite proof that any organized units of the NVA had entered the RVN, although such entry was suspected. It was believed, however, that nearly half of those infiltrated during 1964 were native to NVN. COMUSMACV estimated that 37,449 persons had entered from NVN to join VC units during the period 1959 to the end of 1964. He could confirm, on the basis of POW interrogations,

1. ~~(TS-NOFORN)~~ GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History 1965, p. 109.

2. ~~(S-NOFORN)~~ Special DIA IB 1 Feb 65; (S-NOFORN) DIA IB, 14 Jan 65, p. S-3.

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only 19,678 of these infiltrators, however. One report indicated that approximately 7,500 had infiltrated during 1964.³

As a yardstick of their success at the beginning of 1965, the VC controlled almost one quarter of the rural population and more than half of the countryside of the RVN. Throughout virtually all the nation, the VC were intensifying their tactics of terror against the people. Citizens who favored the GVN were terrified into silence and compliance or eliminated, while those who were uncommitted cooperated with the VC out of sheer fright. The security situation in the larger urban areas was less serious, but there were definite signs that the VC had moved into such cities as Saigon and Da Nang and could, when they chose, create a much more serious security problem in those thickly populated areas.

Strategically, it appeared at the beginning of 1965 that the VC meant to cut off the northern portion of the RVN by driving from the mountains to the sea in the northern part of the II CTZ, sending their main force units from their base camps in Laos and Cambodia across the central highlands to the populous coastal provinces on the South China Sea.

The Republic of Vietnam

The plight of the RVN was discouraging from nearly every view. Pacification, on which a succession of GVN and US officials had pinned high hopes, had come to a virtual standstill by 1965. Unable to respond effectively to the VC initiatives, the RVNAF had been forced into an increasingly defensive role. And it was clearly evident that without a great deal more outside assistance the RVNAF and, consequently, the RVN was going down to defeat.

Statistically at least, the RVN surpassed the VC in armed strength. In January 1965, the RVN had 245,000 men in its regular forces, 99,000 in the RF, 165,000 in the PF, and 31,500 National Police. The regular forces included a 220,000 ARVN and a 7,000-man marine corps generally employed as a reserve force. It also had an 8,000-man navy (VNN) and 11,000-man air force (VNAF). Neither of these latter forces was considered particularly effective by US military authorities. Because the enemy could strike at places and times of his own choosing under conditions completely favorable to him

3. ~~(S-NOFORN)~~ DIA IB, 25 Feb 65, p. S-3.

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and because the forces of the RVN had to be spread throughout the country, the numerical superiority of these forces gave them no real advantage. Adding to the problem was the extreme difficulty of shifting troops and supplies from one area of the RVN to another, particularly with the enemy controlling many of the main LOCs. As the tempo of VC attacks rose, the ARVN was being struck hard in widely separated district capitals, their garrisons of regular forces and regional militia being defeated in rapid succession. In the rural areas, ARVN columns and the PF were being destroyed in numerous ambushes. VC night assaults visited havoc on scattered hamlets and outposts.⁴

US statistical reports forecast the scope of the impending military defeat. In the first month of the new year, the RVNAF suffered 3,313 killed and wounded. While casualty figures might be dismissed as an indication of a brave defense by outnumbered forces, a more ominous picture emerged when these figures were read in conjunction with desertion and weapon losses figures. COMUSMACV reported that in January, 7,000 men had deserted the RVNAF, about the same monthly rate as prevailed in 1964. In the following months this figure would soar to over 11,000 per month. In the first two months of 1965, weapons losses averaged approximately 2,000 units per month.⁵

Political Turmoil Continues

This somber story of military failure was occurring against a background of growing political chaos in the RVN. Sapped by uprisings and coups since late 1963, the GVN had, by 1965, become a jumble of mutually antagonistic factions, religious, political, and military--all maneuvering for control. Government ministries and provincial leaders operated with little direction or support from the central government, and this near-paralysis in government seriously crippled the war effort. Lacking confidence in the ability of the GVN to govern or to prosecute the war, important elements of the population, especially within the large and influential Buddhist community, had become increasingly permeated with antiwar, antigovernment, and anti-US sentiment.

4. ~~(S-NOFORN)~~-GP 1) DIA, SIS-267-65, Jul 65..

5. Ibid.

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The immediate problem, the growing rift between the new Huong government and the Generals, seemed capable of solution. Ambassador Taylor, renewing the efforts he had begun in December to bring about a reconciliation between civilian and military leaders, urged the principals in both factions to negotiate. He succeeded to the extent that on 5 January the Generals and the GVN agreed that Chief of State Suu and Prime Minister Huong would make a public statement that the military had returned full power to the civil government and that the government intended to hold early elections for a national assembly. Simultaneously, the Generals, headed by Khanh, would announce their support for the Huong government and its election plan and would release the persons arrested on 20 December. In addition to these provisions, the communique, finally issued jointly on 9 January, vested all legislative power temporarily in the Chief of State.⁶

Ambassador Taylor doubted that the agreement would last long. Washington, too, had doubts about the effectiveness of the agreement and instructed Taylor to avoid to the extent possible any action that would commit the United States to either the civilian government or to Khanh. For his part, Taylor worked for the integration of the military into the government. This, he hoped, would give them a sense of participation, but not actual control, of the administration. At the same time he tried to make clear the US position regarding the need for political stability so that the various power groups which might be planning "adventures" would know in advance that the United States would not support them.⁷

As the result of behind-the-scenes negotiations, Prime Minister Huong and the Generals reached a solution on the participation of the military in the government which appeared to meet US specifications. On 18 January, Huong reshuffled his cabinet, appointing four generals to the formerly all-civilian body: Nguyen Van Thieu, Commander of IV Corps, became Second Deputy Prime Minister; Tran Van Minh (Little Minh), Chief of Staff of the RVNAF, became Armed Forces Minister of Youth, Sports, and Civil Defense, another new post; and Linh Quang Vien, Director of the Military

6. (S) Msgs, Saigon 2079, 2080, 2099 to State, 060532Z, 071155Z and 091050Z Jan 65, JCS IN 73113, 74666, and 76658.

7. (S) Msgs, Saigon 2133 and 2166 to State, 121150Z and 160823Z Jan 65, JCS IN 78849 and 83669.

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Security Service, was appointed Minister of Information and Psychological Warfare. Huong also dismissed two ministers who were objectionable to the Buddhists.⁸

Bringing the military into the government gave some promise of a more stable GVN, capable of prosecuting the war more effectively. Unfortunately, the settlement between the civilian government and the military did not eliminate the longstanding Buddhist unrest. The Buddhist leadership had remained quiet during the political crisis, but their objectives remained unchanged. They deeply resented Huong's decree of 8 December 1964 creating a General Buddhist Association and wanted him replaced. Tri Quang and the other leaders also attacked Huong for showing weakness vis-a-vis the generals.⁹

On 19 January, Buddhist leaders announced an anti-Huong campaign. They told US Embassy officers that there was no longer any possibility of reaching agreement with Huong on outstanding differences, as he had neither goodwill toward the Buddhists nor power of his own to carry out any agreement. They announced a hunger strike, to death if necessary, by five institute bonzes to secure the overthrow of Huong. Ambassador Taylor noted that this marked a full resumption of the Buddhist confrontation with the government and closed the door to any negotiated settlement between the Huong government and the Buddhists.¹⁰

True to their pledge, the priests launched their hunger strike and Buddhist-inspired students led a demonstration against the government in Saigon. Similar demonstrations continued in the following days and spread to the other major cities, with the bonzes threatening self-immolations to achieve their demands. As the disturbances spread, they became increasingly anti-American, with demonstrators calling for an end to US interference in RVN internal affairs and the

8. NY Times, 19 Jan 65, p. 1. (C) Msgs, Saigon 2176 and 2182 to State, 180459Z and 181111Z Jan 65, JCS IN 84668 and 85801. (S) Msg, Saigon 2201 to State, 200647Z Jan 65, JCS IN 87097.

9. (C) Msgs, Saigon 2016 and 2047 to State, 020825Z and 051230Z Jan 65, JCS IN 71059 and 73126.

10. (C) Msg, Saigon 2200 to State, 200905Z Jan 65, JCS IN 87113.

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expulsion of Ambassador Taylor. The anti-American reaction reached a climax on 23 January when a mob sacked and burned the USIS library in Hue.¹¹

In the midst of this turmoil, the Buddhist leaders reached an agreement with General Khanh: in return for a guarantee of religious freedom, the Buddhists pledged to support a military government for two years and to avoid political activity. US Deputy Ambassador Johnson quickly pointed out to Khanh that the Buddhists had twice in the last six months attempted to veto a Vietnamese government, and he questioned the ability of any new government, even with such an agreement as Khanh had mentioned, to resist successfully Buddhist pressure. Johnson also tried to make "entirely clear" to Khanh that the United States had "less than no enthusiasm" for such a change in government.¹²

Despite this warning, General Khanh and the AFC ousted the Huong government on 27 January. Khanh announced that he would immediately convene a twenty-member military-civilian council, representing religious, political, and military groupings, which would choose a new chief of state and advise the government on important decisions. The Chief of State, with the approval of the new council, would then select a prime minister to form a government. This government would have the responsibility of convening a national assembly. Khanh added that the provisional charter of 20 October 1964 continued in effect, except for those provisions conflicting with "the spirit of this decision." The AFC would remain the "supreme body" until the new council was formed and a government selected, when it would revert to its position as executive body of the military. In the interim, until the new government was formed, the AFC named Nguyen Oanh, Huong's Second Deputy, Acting Prime Minister.¹³

The successful coup once more left the United States with the bleak prospect of supporting a military dictatorship under General Khanh. Putting the best face on the situation, the State Department instructed Ambassador Taylor to deal

11. (C) Msgs, Saigon 2214, 2219, 2257, and 2262 to State, 201425Z, 210610Z, 231125Z, and 231313Z Jan 65, JCS IN 87235, 87936, 90785, and 90770.

12. (S) Msg, Saigon 2282 to State, 251121Z Jan 65, JCS IN 91762.

13. (U) Msg, Saigon 2307 to State, 270349Z Jan 65, JCS IN 93956. (C) Msg, Saigon 2308 to State, 270403Z Jan 65, JCS IN 93767.

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with the new government, not raising the question of recognition lest it might create problems for other countries having relations with the GVN. Taylor was to treat with Khanh in a manner that would neither increase Khanh's prestige nor consolidate his power, but would leave the United States in a position to continue an effective relationship with him should his regime prove viable. At the same time the United States would maintain a flexible position with regard to potential opposition to Khanh among other military leaders and useful contacts with the Buddhists, pending clarification of Khanh's intentions and prospects.¹⁴

For his part, Ambassador Taylor was still convinced that a stable government in Saigon was impossible so long as Khanh remained on the scene. He reported to the State Department that Khanh's ability to stay in power would depend largely on the support of both the Buddhist leaders and the Generals, and Taylor doubted that Khanh could keep both these groups in line. He believed Khanh incapable of maintaining even that minimum level of stability necessary to allow the United States to continue the war at the present level. He urged that the United States take every possible step to prevent Khanh's becoming Chief of State. Taylor had already informed General Ky, who was known to be concerned over the possibility of a Khanh-led GVN, that the United States was not backing Khanh. With Washington's approval, the Ambassador subsequently informed several other of the influential Generals that the United States did not support Khanh. The United States thus was in the position of contributing to the downfall of the "de facto" leader of the GVN, without having a candidate to replace him.¹⁵

14. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 1542 to Saigon, 27 Jan 65, JCS IN 94576. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 1562 to Saigon, 29 Jan 65, JCS IN 97870.

15. (S) Msgs, Saigon 2382 and 2389 to State, 030535Z and 031107Z Feb 65, JCS IN 11361 and 11594. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2391 to State, 031405Z Feb 65, JCS IN 11766. (TS-GP 3) Msg, State 1601 to Saigon, 4 Feb 65, JCS IN 12612; (S) Msg, Saigon 2400 to State, 041145Z Feb 65, JCS IN 13335.

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The United States Military Position in the RVN

The deteriorating military position of the RVN and unabating political turmoil in the nation affected US military planning and actions in Vietnam and caused considerable concern to US military, as well as political, leaders in early 1965. US involvement in the defense of the RVN had steadily increased since 1959 until, by the beginning of 1965, with over 23,000 uniformed Americans in RVN, the United States had become an active belligerent in virtually everything but name. The US Army had about 15,000 men in RVN, about one-third acting in advisory roles or in staff support positions directly under COMUSMACV, the rest providing combat support and combat service support to the RVNAF and US advisors. The US Air Force was employing over 6,000 personnel in RVN to train and develop the VNAF, while a 650-man US Marine unit operated a medium helicopter squadron in support of RVNAF operations in IV CTZ. The US Navy had approximately 1,500 men in the Vietnam area, all employed in administrative and logistic support roles. Despite this impressive commitment of US armed forces and the continued infusion of US supplies and equipment for the RVNAF, the crisis steadily worsened.¹⁶

Concern over the lack of a sound government and the adverse effect of this on the military situation caused General Wheeler to suggest to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that they press military and civilian leaders in Saigon to submerge their difficulties in their own national interest. General Westmoreland, with the concurrence of Ambassador Taylor, on 6 January issued guidelines to MACV advisors to be used in discussions of the political situation with the RVN counterparts. He stressed that the primary US concern was for "stable government in place, able to speak for all its components," adding that the absence of such a government was blocking the US-GVN ability to move ahead more vigorously with the war. He urged the rapid restoration of conditions favorable to the pursuit of the war.¹⁷

16. (S) Recapitulation of US Strength Increases in South Vietnam, 1 Mar 64; (S-GP 4) DJSM-187-65 to CJCS, 16 Feb 65; OCJCS File 091 Feb 65.

17. (S) Msg, Saigon 2053 to State, 6 Jan 65, JCS IN 73522.

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The Dependent Problem

Because the RVN in earlier years had been considered a relatively safe area for Americans, some of the US military and civilian personnel, especially those assigned to the Saigon area, had been allowed to bring their dependents to the RVN. By 1965 there were more than 1,500 dependents in the country. With the increasing political troubles and the upsurge in VC activities in the RVN, the presence of dependents became a source of great worry to the President, who feared for their safety should a full-scale revolution erupt as a result of the political crises or should the VC direct a terror campaign against them. The chances of this latter eventuality appeared on the rise of 1965. In the past year, attacks against American personnel had increased sharply, with 61 major attacks resulting in death to 19 Americans and injury to 253.¹⁸

Withdrawal of these dependents from the RVN had been seriously considered several times in the past. Ambassador Taylor had opposed such action mainly on the ground that it would adversely affect the people and the government leaders of the RVN. By 1965, however, other factors had begun to appear. The presence of dependents, for example, had an inhibiting effect on the freedom of US military action in Vietnam. General Wheeler was convinced, for example, that the continued presence of US dependents had been a major factor in causing the President to hold back in ordering further reprisals against NVN.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted all US dependents evacuated from the RVN prior to or concurrent with the initiation of overt US military action against NVN. In the light of the Brink Hotel bombing and the growing boldness of the VC, they recommended to Secretary McNamara on 4 January the withdrawal of all US dependents from RVN as soon as it was possible to do so in orderly fashion. The

18. (C) MACV Catalogue of Incidents, CINCPAC SDO item number 001, 29 Dec 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov-Dec 64.

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Secretary forwarded the JCS views for consideration at the "highest levels of government."¹⁹

At an interdepartmental meeting on 15 January, Defense and State officials discussed the possible reduction of dependents in the RVN and requested participants to provide further information on this subject. The Joint Staff concluded that the advantages of withdrawal in terms of military freedom of action far outweighed the disadvantages, and that anything less than complete withdrawal of all US dependents would not result in the required military freedom of action.²⁰

The dependent question was still under review when the deteriorating political situation in late January heightened the threat to security of Americans in the RVN. On 26 January, CINCPAC informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the present instability in Saigon, the tenuous security arrangements, and the general vulnerability of US personnel to attack by "dissident elements" made it prudent to withdraw US dependents from the RVN. Admitting the serious political implications of such action, Admiral Sharp stated that because of the worsening situation, evacuation was no longer primarily a political problem but must be decided on the basis of "the actual and growing danger to American lives." On the next day, however, COMUSMACV reported that developments in Saigon had reduced the danger to Americans, and he recommended against evacuation because of its profound, and perhaps disastrous, impact on the RVN.²¹

General Wheeler supported CINCPAC. While agreeing with COMUSMACV that withdrawal at this time would have a great

19. (S) Msg, JCS 5485 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 31 Dec 64, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Nov-Dec 64; (S) CM-277-64 to SecDef, 26 Nov 64, Encl to JCS 2343/496, JMF 9155.3 (26 Nov 64); (S) CM-359-64 to SecDef, 4 Jan 65; (S-GP 4) Memo, OSD to Secy, JCS, 19 Jan 65, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/512; (TS) Note, sgd Bottomley, 4 Jan 65; JMF 9155.3 (4 Jan 65).

20. (TS) J3M-69-65 to D/JS, 18 Jan 65; DJSM-65-65 to ASD(ISA), 18 Jan 65; JMF 9155.3 (4 Jan 65).

21. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 270155Z Jan 65, JCS IN 93713. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 271715Z Jan 65, JCS IN 93924.

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impact in the RVN and the rest of Southeast Asia, he was not persuaded that the impact would necessarily be disastrous. General Wheeler believed that Khanh and other "adventurers" in Saigon were using US dependents as hostages to pressure for their ends. The withdrawal of dependents would free US hands by removing these hostages, by shocking "Khanh and company" into the realization that there were limits to US patience, and by clearing the decks for possible future action.²²

The establishment of the caretaker government on 28 January returned a measure of stability to the RVN and the United States again deferred the question of dependent evacuation.

Proposals for Additional Military Measures in Vietnam

The 30-day period originally scheduled for the completion of Phase One of the Presidential program elapsed in mid-January. While the military portions of the program were well under way by that time, the political side had not fared so well. The program that had seemed so sound in Washington did not follow the prescribed schedule in RVN. To expect an effective GVN to develop in only 30 days proved wishful thinking. The political situation in Saigon by mid-January was no better, and perhaps worse than it had been in early December. The growing anti-American tone of the Buddhist agitation alarmed both COMUSMACV and CINCPAC. On 25 January, CINCPAC positioned an Amphibious Ready Group within a 24-hour reaction time of Da Nang. The next day, at COMUSMACV's request and because of the threat to the US Consulate at Hue and US property in Saigon, he repositioned two Task Groups (TG 76.5 and 76.7) within a six-hour reaction time of Saigon.²³

As the governmental turmoil in Saigon continued through January and February, Phase One of the program was extended into a second month. US military leaders, however, became increasingly impatient to get on with the military actions they had proposed, and recommendations and preparations for

22. (S) Msg, CJCS to CINCPAC, 271547Z Jan 65, OJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jan 65.

23. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 20-65, 26 Jan 65, p. 4, and 21-65, 27 Jan 65, p. 5.

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these operations became of major concern during this period. One of these recommendations was for the use of US jet aircraft in a strike role in the RVN. At the height of the Buddhist unrest, US intelligence experts reported the possibility of VC attacks on district and provincial towns and on critical US installations, especially during the coming Tet period. General Westmoreland himself was convinced that the VC would try to win a spectacular victory during the festival season to coincide with this period of "extreme political uncertainty," and he warned that the widespread civil demonstrations and disorders had so committed RVN forces as to impair their ability to handle any emergency situation without sacrificing the security of metropolitan areas. He noted that the discipline and efficiency of the VNAF in particular had diminished because of General Ky's preoccupation with politics. He asked for authority to use US jets in RVN subject to the following conditions: concurrence of the US Ambassador prior to exercising such authority; the decision to use the US jets would be made by COMUSMACV personally, or by his Deputy, provided that: 1) he considered the situation such that the VC could gain a major victory or that numbers of American lives would otherwise be lost; 2) strikes by US jet aircraft would be controlled by US ground or airborne observers who were in touch with the situation on the ground and the location of friendly troops; 3) reliable intelligence indicated a major VC concentration beyond the capacity of the VNAF or USAF commando units to strike effectively (US jet aircraft might also be employed to take advantage of the opportunity to launch spoiling attacks); and 4) appropriate clearance would be effected in advance with the RVNAF. The Embassy concurred with COMUSMACV's request, and, with White House and State Department agreement, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 27 January authorized the restricted use of US jet aircraft in combat operations in RVN for the first time.²⁴

Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended the resumption of patrols by US destroyers along the coast of NVN in October 1964, higher authority had deferred a decision. At that time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had wanted to establish and maintain a legitimate US presence in international waters, to resume intelligence collections, and to continue to exert pressure on NVN. As one of the military

24. (TS-GP 2) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 260532Z Jan 65, JCS IN 92948. (TS-GP 2) Msg, JCS 4213 to CINCPAC, 27 Jan 65.

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programs under Phase I, DESOTO patrols assumed a new significance. On 28 January the Joint Chiefs of Staff alerted CINCPAC to prepare for a resumption of DESOTO patrols on or about 3 February, the first since their suspension in mid-September. They ordered that the patrols should not be provocative, remaining 30 nm off both the NVN mainland and Hainan Island and south of 20 degrees north latitude. They did, however, authorize patrol ships and supporting aircraft to return fire if attacked, permitting patrol ships to pursue the enemy to the recognized three-mile territorial limit and aircraft hot pursuit inside territorial waters against surface vessels and into hostile air space (including NVN, Hainan Island, and mainland China) against aircraft when necessary to achieve destruction of identified attack forces.²⁵

In planning for resumption of DESOTO patrols the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered the possibility of NVN attacks on the destroyers and consequent US reprisals. They ordered CINCPAC to preposition retaliatory forces prior to commencement of the patrol and directed him to proceed with reprisal planning against five targets in the southern part of NVN. The five targets were all from the JCS Outline Plan of 14 November 1964 for air operations against NVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also directed CINCPAC to prepare a further strike increment for the VNAF against an additional NVN target.

In the next few days the JCS revised their reprisal planning guidance to provide greater flexibility in reprisal options and to include targets considered "more suitable in terms of Washington objectives." They asked CINCPAC to develop reprisal plans based on three attack options. In ascending order these options increased the scale of the attack, although all three options were against low-value military targets, primarily barracks areas, in southern NVN.²⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were not the only ones anticipating NVN attacks on DESOTO patrols. Ambassador Taylor even hoped that the planned patrol would bring about the opportunity for US reprisals. On 31 January he told Washington that an NVN attack on a DESOTO patrol followed by

25. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4244 to CINCPAC, 28 Jan 65.

26. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, JCS 4297 and 4484 to CINCPAC, 29 Jan and 3 Feb 65.

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immediate, strong, and effective US retaliation would offer "a priceless advantage to our cause here."²⁷

The DESOTO patrol planned for 3 February was never conducted. It was postponed first because of Tet (2-6 February), and later, to prevent it from coinciding with the visit of Premier Kosygin to Hanoi.²⁸

In support of another of the Phase I actions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff late in January asked the Secretary of Defense to approve additional OPLAN 34A Maritime operations. Such covert operations had continued throughout January based on the first four increments of Package One actions furnished to COMUSMACV on 15 December 1964. On 5 January 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had authorized VNAF air support for 34A Maritime operations south of the 18th Parallel and on 21 January the Joint Chiefs of Staff had codified and consolidated approval procedures to give COMUSMACV the maximum possible flexibility for planning and advance approval within the limitations set by higher authority.

By the end of the month, COMUSMACV had completed three of the four increments. On 30 January, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested the Secretary of Defense to approve an additional four increments under Package One. COMUSMACV had prepared these additional increments at JCS direction, using the original Package One planning guidance of early December 1964. The Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out to the Secretary of Defense that all the actions recommended were of types previously approved for execution with the addition of one new action providing for PTF harassment of coastal villages by firing illumination and leaflet 81mm mortar shells over the villages, but so designed that no physical harm would be done to the inhabitants or houses. The Deputy Secretary of Defense approved the four new increments, and after coordination with the White House and the State Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff notified CINCPAC and COMUSMACV of this approval. OPLAN 34A Maritime operations were based on these increments until

27. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2359 to State, 31 Jan 65, JCS IN 98620.

28. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4422 to CINCPAC, 2 Feb 65; (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4612 to CINCPAC, 4 Feb 65.

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mid-June 1965, when the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted additional increments to the Secretary of Defense.²⁹

Reprisals

Throughout this period, the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to be concerned with the general question of reprisals. On 29 January, in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, they pointed out that the VC had carried out 61 attacks against US military and civilian personnel in RVN during 1964, and reviewed their previous proposals for retaliation against NVN. They repeated their argument that US failure to respond to major VC/NVN attacks against US personnel could be misconstrued and result in further attacks against Americans. Noting Ambassador Taylor's support for reprisals, the Joint Chiefs of Staff once again recommended a positive, timely, and appropriate response to the next significant provocation in order to signal Hanoi that further provocations would bring prompt and destructive US retaliation. They urged the execution of such a reprisal against selected NVN targets within 24 hours of the incident, using the VNAF to the extent feasible. They also provided Mr. McNamara with a resume of reprisal actions of varying intensity for which plans were available for rapid execution. Again, the Secretary of Defense noted the Joint Chiefs of Staff views and passed them on to the State Department and the White House.³⁰

Because of the increased high level interest in operations against NVN, on 1 February the Chief of Staff, Army, in a memorandum to the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned that any direct military pressure against NVN carried an inherent risk of overt Chinese Communist intervention. He urged the Joint Chiefs of Staff not to ignore this risk, and recommended a program of additional military actions to prepare the United States for the eventuality of direct CHICOM intervention in

29. (TS-GP 1) Msgs, JCS 3486 and 3995 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 5 and 21 Jan 65. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-72-65 to SecDef, 30 Jan 65 (derived from JCS 2343/516); (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 4707 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 052211Z Feb 65; JMF 9155.3 (15 Jan 65).

30. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-70-65 to SecDef, 29 Jan 65 (derived from JCS 2343/514); (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/514, 8 Feb 65; JMF 9155.3 (22 Jan 65).

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(Dong Hoi, Vit Thu Lu, Chap Le, and Vu Con) in areas supplying men and arms for attacks in RVN. US forces would strike the first three targets, while VNAF and FARM GATE aircraft would hit Vu Con. All targets were on the JCS list of reprisal attack options, forwarded to CINCPAC on 3 February.³³

When informed of the planned reprisals, the GVN was enthusiastic. Acting Prime Minister Oanh "readily" concurred and General Khanh, when contacted by General Westmoreland, also approved. Taylor told Oanh that "this reprisal action was a significant new step which we should take enthusiastically and with a visible clearing of the boards for possible future action." Taylor informed Oanh that the United States meant to prepare for such future action by bringing in HAWK missiles to Da Nang and possibly evacuating US dependents. He urged the GVN to think of ways to exploit these reprisals and to demonstrate that "a new and encouraging element" had been added to the war.³⁴

On 7 February the JCS ordered CINCPAC to execute the reprisal strikes, using "optimum conventional ordnance," excluding napalm, on Dong Hoi, Vit Thu Lu and Chap Le Barracks, with the VNAF and FARM GATE aircraft hitting Vu Con Barracks. They also alerted CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to expect an announcement within the next 12 hours of the decision to withdraw all US dependents from South Vietnam. The evacuation was to be "expedited but orderly" with CINCPAC designating safe havens and providing the necessary airlift. At the same time, the State Department notified US Ambassadors in key world capitals of the pending reprisals. The Department instructed the Ambassadors (except those in Moscow and Paris) to inform their host governments of the action being taken.³⁵

33. ~~(TS)~~ NMCC EA Chronological Log, 6 Feb 65, OCJCS File, Pleiku Incident. Statement by SecDef, 7 Feb 65, Dept of State Bulletin, LII (22 Feb 65), pp. 239-240. ~~(TS-GP 1)~~ Msg, JCS 4484 to CINCPAC, 030019Z Feb 64.

34. ~~(S)~~ Msg, Saigon 2417 to State, 070430Z Feb 65, JCS IN 16924.

35. ~~(TS-GP 1)~~ Msg, JCS 4766 to CINCPAC, 070220Z Feb 65. ~~(TS-GP 3)~~ Msgs, JCS 4756 and 4758 to CINCPAC, 070246Z and 070428Z Feb 65. ~~(S-GP 1)~~ Msg, State Circular 1438, 6 Feb 65 (11:41 PM EST) JCS IN 17080.

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CINCPAC acted at once to carry out the reprisals, placing all PACOM forces in Vietnam, Thailand, and the South China Sea area on DEFCON 2 and the remaining PACOM forces west of 160°E longitude on DEFCON 3. He directed CINCPACAF, CINCPACFLT, and COMUSMACV to execute the strikes. Weather conditions on 7 February forced the cancellation of three of the four strikes, including the VNAF/FARM GATE strike on Vu Con Barracks, but 49 aircraft from the USS HANCOCK and USS CORAL SEA hit the remaining target, Dong Hoi Barracks, losing one US plane in the attack.³⁶

Ambassador Taylor recommended to Washington that authority be given "at once" to reschedule the three cancelled missions on the morning of 8 February (Saigon time). But because high State Department and Defense officials wished to avoid the appearance of a continuing series of attacks, further air strikes by US forces were not approved. The rescheduling of the VNAF strike on the Vu Con Barracks, with suitable weather alternate targets, was authorized and executed on 8 February. One VNAF plane was lost.³⁷

To be ready for possible NVN retaliation, the President approved, and the JCS directed, the immediate air movement of the Headquarters plus one battery of the Marine LAAM battalion from Okinawa to Da Nang. (The first LAAM battery became operational at Da Nang on 8 February.) The Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to alert the remainder of the LAAM battalion for movement to Vietnam and alerted the 173d Airborne Brigade for transfer by air from Okinawa to RVN. They also instructed CINCPAC to position one Amphibious Group with the Marine SLF off Cap St. Jacques and CINCSRIKE to alert 10 tactical fighter squadrons for movement to WESTPAC. CINCPAC had recommended alerting only three squadrons, but the President had directed that 10 be alerted.³⁸

36. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 070750Z Feb 65, JCS IN 17259. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACAF, CINCPACFLT, and COMUSMACV, 070300Z Feb 65, JCS IN 16845. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 31-65, 8 Feb 65, pp. 1, 7.

37. (S) Msg, Saigon 2419 to State, 070636Z Feb 65, JCS IN 17047. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 4764 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 071459Z Feb 65; JCS 4775 to CINCS, 081000Z Feb 65.

38. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 4760 to CINCPAC and CINCSRIKE, 070455Z Feb 65; JCS 4762 to CINCPAC, 071341Z Feb 65. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, vol II, p. 451. (S) Note to Control Div, "US Reprisals Against Viet Cong Attacks in South Vietnam," 7 Feb 65, OCJCS File, Pleiku Incident. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4766 to CINCPAC, 071707Z Feb 65.

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In Saigon, Acting Prime Minister Oanh and Ambassador Taylor jointly announced the reprisal action. The brief announcement stated that military action had been taken against installations in NVN which had been directing and supporting aggression in RVN.³⁹

Following the Saigon statement, the White House announced the VC attacks and justified the subsequent reprisal action. The statement emphasized that the US/GVN action was in response to provocations ordered and directed by Hanoi and was justified because of the markedly increased and continuing NVN infiltration of the south. The White House stressed that the joint response had been "carefully limited" to military areas that were supplying men and arms for attacks in the RVN. The statement added that the United States, as it had frequently said, sought "no wider war." Whether or not this course could be maintained lay with Hanoi, the key to the situation being the cessation of infiltration from NVN and a "clear indication" of Hanoi's intention to cease aggression against its neighbors.⁴⁰

Addressing the nation, the President announced his decision to withdraw US dependents from RVN and warned that expanded US action in Vietnam might continue. He stated that it had become clear that Hanoi had undertaken a more aggressive course of action against both RVN and American installations and that the United States had no choice "but to clear the decks and make absolutely clear our determination to back South Vietnam in its fight to maintain its independence." The President also announced the deployment of the HAWK air defense battalion to RVN and stated that other reinforcements "in units and individuals" might follow.⁴¹

39. (8) Msg, Saigon 2426 to State, 071015Z Feb 65, JCS IN 17183.

40. White House Statement, 7 Feb 65, Dept of State Bulletin, LII (22 Feb 65), pp. 238-239.

41. The first US dependents departed Saigon on 8 Feb and by 19 Feb all medically-able US dependents (1,593) had left South Vietnam. Statement by the Pres, 7 Feb 65, Dept of State Bulletin, LII (22 Feb 65), p. 239. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 32-65, 9 Feb 65, p. 4 and 41-65, 19 Feb 65, p. 5.

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Radio Hanoi claimed that the "unjustified" attack had been "victoriously rebuffed," alleging to have downed the "aggressor" US aircraft. Both Moscow and Peking condemned the US "provocation" and pledged support and assistance to Hanoi, but both statements were cautions, neither raising the specter of a broad conflict or portraying the US action as a threat to world peace.

Unfortunately from a political standpoint, Soviet Premier Kosygin was in Hanoi at the time of the reprisal strikes. The Soviet Ambassador to the United States, in private discussion with Department of State officials, assailed the bombing, saying he believed it was actually related to Kosygin's visit to Hanoi. He was assured that this was not the case and that the United States, when it first learned of Kosygin's plans to visit Hanoi had taken certain steps, including the calling off of the DESOTO patrols. Hanoi had forced the bombing of its territory by the outrage at Pleiku.⁴²

For months the Joint Chiefs of Staff had urged higher authorities to retaliate against VC/NVN provocations against US personnel to indicate to Hanoi that such attacks would bring prompt and destructive US reply. The Pleiku reprisal was, apparently, not a sufficient deterrent; just two days later, on 10 February, VC bombs destroyed a US enlisted man's billet (the Viet Cuong Hotel) in the coastal city of Qui Nhon, killing 23 soldiers of the 140th Aviation Maintenance Battalion and wounding 22 others.⁴³ Again, CINCPAC recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff strong retaliation by both US and VNAF planes. Ambassador Johnson, after reviewing the situation with General Westmoreland, agreed that this "serious VC atrocity" justified prompt air reprisal. Taylor reported to Washington that both the MACV and VNAF planners were at work on specific recommendations on targets for reprisal. Ambassador Taylor had already alerted Acting Premier Oanh of the possible reprisal and General Westmoreland was alerting General Khanh.⁴⁴

42. (S) Msg, Saigon 2435 to State, 080825 Z Feb 65, JCS IN 17792. (C-GP 1) USIA Special Memo, 10 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 65. NY Times, 9 Feb 65, p. 1; 10 Feb 65, p. 1. (S) Memo of Conversation, Dobrynin and Thompson, 15 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Feb 65.

43. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMs 34-65, 11 Feb 65, p. 1 and 40-65, 18 Feb 65, p. 1.

44. (TS-GP 2) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 101540Z Feb 65, JCS IN 21384. (S) Msg, Saigon 2491 to State, 10 Feb 65, JCS IN 21442.

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Within hours of the attack, the President met with the NSC, including Admiral McDonald, Acting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to consider actions to be taken in retaliation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended seven targets in NVN as reprisal targets. The Secretary of Defense proposed to the President that three of these targets, the Thanh Hoa Bridge and two barracks areas, be bombed. Because of objections that the bridge was too far north--it was just below the 20th parallel--the President directed that only two targets, the Chanh Hoa barracks and the Vu Con barracks, would be hit.

Acting on the President's decision, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered CINCPAC to execute reprisal strikes against NVN during daylight hours of 11 February, designating Chanh Hoa barracks as the primary US target and Vu Con barracks as the primary VNAF target.⁴⁵

Accordingly, on 11 February 1965, the United States launched the largest reprisal air strike to date against NVN. More than 100 planes from the USS HANCOCK, USS RANGER, and USS CORAL SEA struck Chanh Hoa barracks, while 28 VNAF planes, supported by 22 US aircraft, hit their weather alternate target, Chap Le barracks. Both attacks were successful, although the US lost three planes in the Chanh Hoa strike.⁴⁶

Upon the completion of the strikes, the White House announced that US air elements had joined the VNAF in attacks against military facilities in NVN used for the training and infiltration of VC personnel into South Vietnam. The Washington statement justified the strikes as reprisal not only for the Qui Nhon incident, but also as a response to additional direct provocations by the Hanoi regime, citing the increased number of VC ambushes and attacks against RVN and US personnel since 8 February. The White House stated that the US Government had been in consultation with the GVN and that, while both governments wished to avoid spreading the conflict, they felt compelled to take action. Following the White House announcement, Ambassador Taylor and Acting

⁴⁵. NY Times, 11 Feb 65, p. 1 (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 4962 and 4973 to CINCPAC, 10 Feb 65.

⁴⁶. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, JCS 5010 to NSA et al., 11 Feb 65. (~~TS~~-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 35-65, 12 Feb 65, p. 3.

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Premier Oanh released a joint statement in Saigon giving the details of the reprisal and echoing the Washington justification.⁴⁷

In the reprisal strikes on 7, 8, and 11 February against Dong Hoi, Chap Le and Chanh Hoa a total of 267 sorties had been directed against a total of 491 buildings. Only 47 buildings had been destroyed and 22 damaged, and operations at the target areas were relatively unimpaired. Secretary McNamara informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, in spite of the limited effectiveness of the strikes, he was quite satisfied with the results. "Our primary objective, of course," he said, "was to communicate our political resolve. This I believe we did." He then showed that he really was not satisfied at all, pointing out that "future communications of resolve" would carry a "hollow ring" unless the US planes did more damage than in this case. He expressed concern and doubt over the adequacy of the military planning and/or the execution of future missions, observing that "Surely we cannot continue for months accomplishing no more with 267 sorties than we did on these . . . missions."⁴⁸

Secretary McNamara was not alone in feeling that the reprisal planning and techniques for strikes against NVN could stand some improvement. General Westmoreland felt the same way, although for different reasons. On the day following the Qui Nhon reprisals, COMUSMACV sent a lengthy message to Admiral Sharp criticizing the procedures which had been used and describing just how much confusion and lost motion had taken place in Saigon on 10 and 11 February getting ready for these reprisals. Particularly he complained about lack of information on what was going on, and about the seemingly unnecessary changes in direction which took place in the two-day period. He charged that his 2d Air Division had worked all night for no purpose and that units were "whiplashed" and confused by orders and counter orders.⁴⁹

47. White House Statement, Dept of State Bulletin, LII (1 Mar 65), p. 290; Joint US-South Vietnamese Statement, *ibid.*, p. 291.

48. (S) Memo, SecDef for CJCS, 17 Feb 65, OCJCS Files 091 Vietnam, Feb 65.

49. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV 130356Z, Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 65.

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Admiral Sharp responded by reminding General Westmoreland of the several specific directives that had been issued, assigning responsibilities and establishing relationships, and forwarding target information. CINCPAC also stated that the system was in his opinion capable of doing the job very well.

With particular regard to the 11 February reprisals, Admiral Sharp listed for COMUSMACV those activities that had preceded the strike in which he had been personally involved. Upon being notified by the CINCPAC duty officer of the attack upon Qui Nhon, Admiral Sharp had immediately called Saigon and had directed CINCPACFLT to return the carrier HANCOCK to Point Yankee and to start loading his aircraft for reprisal strikes. He had directed CINCPACAF to alert his forces in SE Asia and at Clark Air Force Base. He had called General Wheeler in Washington and then called Admiral Mustin, J-3, to recommend the Option 3 attacks provided by the existing operational order.⁵⁰

He reminded Westmoreland that, under the terms of the operations orders in effect on 10 and 11 February, CINCPACAF had been directed to plan for USAF strikes against NVN, and that specific orders, still current on 10 and 11 February, had directed COMUSMACV to continue planning for the VNAF to strike its assigned target. Both of these standing orders had been provided by the existing operations order, paralleled by numerous phone conversations with the various commands involved. "You and the component commanders were given information just as fast as we received it," Sharp told Westmoreland. "This flow of information, combined with the clear directives that I have outlined above, should have resulted in a minimum of confusion." While Sharp agreed it was unfortunate that COMUSMACV's officers worked all night to no purpose and in confusion, he noted that the Navy's carrier forces, operating under similar instructions and orders, were not confused and had carried out their preparations and strikes smoothly and with a minimum of fuss in accordance with the basic operations order.⁵¹

COMUSMACV was informed by CINCPAC that in future similar situations it was his intention to continue to exercise operational command through CINCPACFLT for carrier forces, CINCPACAF for USAF forces and through COMUSMACV for the VNAF. He was

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

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convinced that this system would work as smoothly as any for a complicated joint, combined operation of this nature. "In this operation Commander, 2d Air Division works for you in planning the VNAF strikes and for CINCPACAF in planning the USAF strikes. This two-hatted arrangement will work perfectly well if we all will recognize it as a fact of life and help him in this difficult assignment."52

The US response to the Pleiku and Qui Nhon attacks was more than mere reprisal; it marked a turning point in the war. Within a four-day period, the United States had carried out two air attacks against NVN, ordered the withdrawal of all US dependents from RVN, deployed a HAWK battalion to Da Nang, moved additional aircraft to WESTPAC, and warned that reinforcements in units and individuals might soon follow. In announcing his decision to take these steps, President Johnson stated that the United States had no choice but to "clear the decks," making absolutely clear its continued determination to back the South Vietnamese fight for the maintenance of its independence. Ambassador Taylor called the reprisals a "significant forward step" in demonstrating US determination, and a "good foundation" for embarking on a graduated reprisal program to bring increased pressure on NVN to cease its intervention in the South.53

52. Ibid.

53. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2455 to State, 9 Feb 65, JCS IN 19338. (TS-GP 1) Msg, State 1693 to Saigon, 11 Feb 65, JCS IN 06067.

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Chapter 18

THE QUANTUM JUMP--ROLLING THUNDER

Even before the Pleiku reprisals the development of US policy on Vietnam had reached a stage at which basic decisions concerning the nature and level of US actions in the RVN and against NVN could no longer be postponed. The decision for reprisal in early February, although significant, was an interim decision, the precursor but not the prototype of more vital decisions that lay in the offing. The direction that US policy would now take depended on a number of difficult judgments. These judgments involved, among others, the real gravity of the military and political situations in the RVN, the capabilities and intentions of the enemy in the RVN and in NVN, and the consequences to the US national interest of success or failure in Vietnam. In a broader context the United States would also have to judge the effect of its military and political actions in Southeast Asia upon its relations with its allies, with its potential enemies, and with neutral or uncommitted nations throughout the world.

Although President Johnson was resolved to prevent the seizure of the RVN by the communists, he believed that he needed more information and better answers to certain important questions before making these final judgments and the decisions that would logically follow. In early February, therefore, he sent a party headed by Mr. McGeorge Bundy, one of his most trusted advisors, to the RVN to talk with Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland. Bundy had been a prime mover in formulating such policy as had emerged from the November-December meetings in Washington. Bundy's instructions from the President called for a broad-ranging inquiry to evaluate relative capabilities and prospects of enemy and friendly forces, the effectiveness and progress of present US programs, the political situation in the RVN, and the actions that the United States might take outside of the RVN to influence the war favorably. With specific reference to actions against NVN, Bundy was to examine the feasibility of initial shallow penetrations by air into NVN, followed by actual attacks on targets, and to determine how this action should begin and what preliminary actions would be required.

Bundy's investigation had been carried out in RVN before the VC attack on Pleiku. He and the party returned to the United States immediately after this attack.

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The Bundy Report-7 February 1965

Upon his return, Mr. Bundy gave the President advice which appears to have had significant effect on the President's decisions in the next few weeks and months.

Initially, Bundy gave his advice in a memorandum, telling the President the same things the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been telling him for several months--unless the United States did something soon, it was going to lose in Vietnam and it could not afford to lose. "The international prestige of the United States and a substantial part of our influence, are directly at risk in Vietnam," Bundy said. There was no way of unloading the burden on the Vietnamese or of negotiating a way out at present. A negotiated withdrawal would mean surrender "on the installment plan."¹

Bundy had found great uncertainty among both Vietnamese and Americans in Vietnam. The Vietnamese were nervous about the sincerity of the United States; their political leaders were fearful, and their military leaders wary. The rank and file Vietnamese displayed a general lassitude and a lack of commitment or purpose. As to the Americans, the morale of junior officers was sustained by their demanding tasks and dedication. The senior officials, on the other hand, bore heavy responsibilities and Bundy noted "one can sense the inner doubts of men whose outward behaviour remains determined." Bundy took some heart in a slowly rising effectiveness of the RVNAF and in the resilience of the Vietnamese people who, though war-weary, were anxious not to fall under communist domination.

He had, in spite of a careful examination of the political scene, come away with mixed judgments. In the short run, the current interim government was strong enough to allow the United States to take its immediate military reprisals and other actions. At a longer range, to support broader and more meaningful programs to unify the country, a stronger government would have to be created. Ambassador Taylor and Mission

1. (2S) Memo for the Pres from McGeorge Bundy, "Re The Situation in Vietnam," 7 Feb 65, OCJCS Vietnam Special File, Black Notebook.

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personnel felt that Khanh was dangerous, could not be trusted, and would fail eventually. They believed also that the Buddhists were dangerous and would have to be faced down, if necessary militarily. The Buddhists, if they kept their power, would unseat any government that did not bow to their demands. Bundy said of these views, "We tend to differ with the mission on both counts." Bundy saw no one else than Khanh in sight who could combine military authority with some sense of politics. The Buddhists would have to be incorporated in the affairs of the GVN rather than be eliminated.

If, by reprisals, the immediate situation in RVN could be saved, the most important order of business for the United States would be the establishment of an improved and broadened pacification program, particularly the nonmilitary elements. Bundy felt that, because of the predominant role of the US military, "and because of the generous spirit and broad mind" of General Westmoreland, military units, particularly Special Forces, might play a much more important role in pacification than in the past.

"The prospect of Vietnam is grim," Mr. Bundy warned the President. "The energy and persistence of the Viet Cong are astonishing. They can appear anywhere--and at almost any time. They have accepted extraordinary losses and they come back for more. They show skill in their sneak attacks and ferocity when cornered. Yet the weary country does not want them to win." The United States must take every chance to convince the Vietnamese people of the firmness of its commitment to them. For this "overriding reason" Mr. Bundy now recommended a policy of sustained reprisal against NVN. "Once such a policy is put in force, we shall be able to speak in Vietnam on many topics and in many ways, with growing force and effectiveness," Bundy said.

He warned that the struggle would be long and that it was important to make this clear to the people of the United States and to the people of the RVN. "Too often in the past we have conveyed the impression that we expect an early solution when those who live with this war know that no early solution is possible," he said.

Mr. Bundy, speaking for the group who had accompanied him to RVN as well as himself, then told the President that the best available way of increasing the United States' chances of success in Vietnam was to carry out a policy of "sustained reprisal" against NVN by launching air and naval

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attacks against that nation. He pointed out that it would be costly and risky to follow this course, but cost and risk could be accepted. The United States might have to attack the whole air defense system of NVN. "US casualties would be higher--and more visible to American feelings--than those sustained in the struggle in South Vietnam," he added. When compared to the costs to the United States of being defeated in RVN, however, the program would be cheap. It was not sure-fire. It might fail. But in Bundy's view the United States should make the effort.²

These reprisals should be carried out in partnership with the GVN, keyed initially to specific acts of violence such as the Pleiku incident. Once the program was launched, however, it could be continued without relating it to any specific enemy act. It must be made clear to Hanoi and to the world that the United States was not out to destroy or conquer NVN. Reprisals would stop when provocation stopped. The program should be preceded by world-wide explanation of its purpose, but once bombing began publicity should be kept to a minimum.

The bombing of NVN should begin at a low level, increasing only gradually, indeed, decreasing if the VC seemed to be responding by reducing their terrorism in the RVN. The object was not to "win" the war against Hanoi, but to influence favorably the war in the RVN. This course of action bore with it, however, a risk of greatly increased VC terrorism and possibly greater involvement by Hanoi and Communist China.

Bundy also stated that the attack against Pleiku had created an ideal opportunity for the prompt development and execution of sustained reprisals. Among the "major necessary steps" he suggested to the President were: 1) complete the evacuation of dependents, 2) deploy necessary supporting forces for contingency plans, 3) initiate joint planning with GVN on both civil and military level, 4) take necessary diplomatic steps, 5) publicly renew US commitment to its programs in RVN.

2. (TS) Annex A to Memo, Bundy for the Pres, 7 Feb 65, same file.

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The Eight Week Program

At a meeting at the White House on 8 February, Bundy discussed his proposals with the President and his other chief advisors. All present, including the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, agreed that the United States should now embark on a program of sustained actions against lower risk targets in the southern part of NVN. Mr. Bundy put it in terms of starting off with what looked like reprisals and then expanding the program as appropriate. The President approved this approach. After the meeting, however, the Secretary of Defense told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that there was some "leeway" in the Presidential approval and that what was now needed was a program with specific bombing actions that the President could approve.

He asked for a program covering eight weeks, designed as reprisal actions against NVN/VC provocations, with two or three attacks scheduled each week. The Secretary also stipulated that he be given a list of those types of provocative incidents that could be used as reasons for initiating the program, that large-scale air deployments be made to PACOM to support the program or its aftermath, that the security of RVN bases be taken into account, and that plans be made to counter any NVN/CHICOM ground intervention. Only in case of NVN/CHICOM air intervention would attacks be made against the communist MIG base at Phuc Yen. He also directed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff plan for VNAF participation in the attacks on NVN.³

In readying their proposals the JCS used the detailed, in-depth plans, including target lists, that had been under preparation for months within the Joint Staff and at CINCPAC's headquarters. They considered also the views of Ambassador Taylor, who had been clearly heartened by the reprisals of 7-8 February and had immediately asked for more. Ambassador Taylor, who agreed with Bundy that the current reprisals had established a good foundation for other bombing, told the Secretary of State on 9 February that the bombing should be part of a measured and controlled series of actions against NVN, taken in reprisal for its intervention in the RVN with the objective of forcing an end to such intervention. He wanted VNAF pilots to participate with US flyers in attacks

3. (~~TOP SECRET~~ GP 1) JCSM-100-65 to SecDef, 11 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2339/169), JMF 9155 (10 Feb 65).

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against purely military targets. In line with Bundy's recommendation, Taylor suggested that "reprisals" could be mounted against any general catalog or package of VC/NVN acts in the RVN and not necessarily in response to some particularly grave act. Taylor considered that the US response would be tantamount to the "so-called Phase II escalation" but "justified on the basis of retaliation."⁴

Taylor concluded by saying ". . . I believe a Phase II program based largely on graduated reprisals offers the best available means of exerting increased pressure on the DRV leaders to induce them to cease their intervention in SVN, while at the same time being more manageable in terms of domestic and international opinion and with our friends. I recommend that we proceed along this track."

In developing the eight week program the Joint Staff progressed swiftly because of the work already accomplished on targeting, deployments, and other support requirements. Some differences arose over the deployments necessary to support the eight week program. The Chief of Staff of the Air Force originally proposed to deploy 15 additional squadrons to the Western Pacific. The Chief of Staff of the Army considered this an excessive number, inconsistent with the NVN/CHICOM threat and the scope of air operations visualized for the first eight weeks of operations. There were, said General Johnson, already 865 US aircraft in the Western Pacific and the USAF was capable of deploying very rapidly if the need arose. He believed, therefore, that an additional nine squadrons would be sufficient to the mission at hand. The Chief of Staff of the Army did not agree either that the concurrent ground force deployments being proposed would be adequate. One US infantry division was required in northeast Thailand, as a minimum, with a second division in the same area advisable.⁵

4. (~~TS~~) Msg, Saigon 2445 to State, 9 Feb 65, JCS IN 19338.

5. (~~TS~~-GP 1) CSAM-58-65 to JCS, 10 Feb 65; (~~TS~~) Army flimsy, unnumbered, n.d., tabled by CSA, 10 Feb 65, 1400; JMF 9155 (10 Feb 65).

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Compromise solutions were worked out on these points, and at their meeting on 10 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the eight week program prepared by the Joint Staff.⁶

The program of military actions which the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary in a memorandum on 11 February was primarily a plan of air strikes, but it also provided for naval gunfire bombardment, continuation of covert operations, resumption of DESOTO Patrols, and cross-border ground operations into Laos.⁷

The Air Strikes

The bombings in NVN which the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed were against targets located south of the 19th Parallel. They also proposed, however, armed reconnaissance of Route 7 in NVN close to the Laotian border. These air attacks were scheduled for the first eight weeks at the rate of four fixed targets per week. Armed reconnaissance would be flown over two road segments each week. All targets proposed were military in nature and were taken from the JCS 94 Target List. The estimated number of sorties required for each target, either with tactical or strategic bombers, was also provided Secretary McNamara. Fixed targets were barracks or storage depots and areas, with a few LOC targets, such as bridges, included.

In order to support these attacks, to provide security for strike forces, to deter aggression by NVN or CHICOM forces, and to improve US readiness to "cope with possible escalation," the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended the immediate deployment of the following: 1) 9 additional Tactical Fighter Squadrons (TFS) from the CONUS to WESTPAC; 2) 30 B-52 bombers from CONUS to Guam; 3) one Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) consisting

6. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Briefing Sheet, J-3 for CJCS "JCS 2339/169-Courses of Action Southeast Asia - First Eight Weeks (S)"; (~~TS~~-GP 1) SM-140-65 to JCS, 11 Feb 65; (~~TS~~-GP 1) Dec On Rpt, J-3 to JCS "Courses of Action Southeast Asia - First Eight Weeks (S)," 12 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2339/169); JMF 9155 (10 Feb 65) secs 1 and 2.

7. (~~TS~~-GP 1) JCSM-100-65 to SecDef, (derived from JCS 2339/169) 11 Feb 65, JMF 9155 (10 Feb 65).

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of a Regimental Landing Team (RLT) and a Marine Air Group (MAG) from Okinawa and Japan to Da Nang; 4) one US Army Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division from Hawaii to Thailand; 5) a fourth CVA to the Western Pacific; 6) one MEB from Hawaii to WESTPAC; 7) the necessary combat support and service support units outlined in CINCPAC 39-65 to support the above forces. At the same time a US Army Airborne Brigade, the 173d, should be alerted for shipment to Vietnam. The 3d MEF (-) and the 25th Infantry Division (-) should be kept in an advanced state of readiness with the necessary amphibious and sealift prepositioned and airlift alerted. Remaining forces contained in CINCPAC plans 32-64 and 39-65 should also be alerted.

The Chief of Staff of the Army agreed with the recommended deployments as far as they went. But he wanted additional ground forces--at least one US infantry division and, preferably, two,--moved to northeast Thailand. General Wheeler supported the strike program and the recommended deployment. But he was not sure that the deployment problem had been examined carefully enough, and proposed that, once the forces recommended had reached their stations, additional deployments should be studied as a matter of priority. The Secretary of Defense was informed that such a study was already taking place.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff listed in detail the forces which should be deployed, as a minimum, in the event a large-scale intervention by NVN or CHICOM forces took place. These were the forces called for in CINCPAC contingency plans. In conjunction with the military actions recommended in the current eight week program, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that operations already taking place should be continued and, where feasible, intensified.

They told Mr. McNamara that their proposals would demonstrate to NVN that it had better mend its ways or face "more serious punishment." And they suggested that if Hanoi did not show some inclination to lessen its support of the VC and the PL even after being bombed, the United States should extend its bombing north of the 19th Parallel, intensifying the bombing if necessary.⁸

8. Ibid.

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While making the point that the program would be initiated in response to enemy activities of a provocative nature, the Joint Chiefs of Staff foresaw that the need for such justification would lessen. "As this program continues," they told the Secretary of Defense, "the realistic need for precise event-association in this reprisal context will progressively diminish." They did however include the list of examples of provocative acts which might trigger the program since he had asked for it specifically.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff predicted that Hanoi, Peking, and Moscow would "make every effort through propaganda and diplomatic moves to halt the US attacks." Hanoi would do everything possible to defend itself, perhaps even launching overt attacks against RVN and Laos. The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not foresee any immediate lessening of VC attacks. But if the United States were able to resist the almost certain international pressures and to ignore communist threats of escalation, chances would improve that Hanoi would reduce its support of the VC. US attacks on NVN would probably cause Communist China reluctantly to take some dramatic action such as sending in "volunteers," a la Korea 1950. The Soviets, in addition to strong diplomatic and propaganda efforts, would almost certainly provide NVN some form of military support such as antiaircraft artillery and radars. There was an even chance that Russia would send in SAM's (SA-2) along with "technicians." If China and Russia went further and started open aggressive action, the Joint Chiefs of Staff assured Secretary McNamara that "the United States and its allies can deal with them adequately."

These recommendations of 11 February by the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not exceed, but merely reinforced, the strong recommendations they had made in November for action against NVN. In certain respects, such as targeting, these latest proposals were more specific; in other respects--bombing of Phuc Yen and weight of effort, for example--less comprehensive. Their proposals were not approved at once or in detail, but, complementing as they did the proposals by Bundy and Taylor, were reflected both in short-range and longer-range actions directed by the President in the days and weeks that followed.

Commenting on the need for a stronger and more positive military program against NVN, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed CINCPAC on the same day the JCS memorandum went forward to the Secretary that he did not like the impression being created generally that the

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United States was responding only to VC "spectaculars" against Americans. He was opposed to letting the intermittent attacks against NVN slip into the "tit-for-tat" pattern. Any concept which limited the United States to a particular type of retaliatory action or in the timing and location of strikes, would automatically hand the initiative to Hanoi and color world opinion against the United States. "Our objective," he told Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland on 11 February, "is to move to a concept of 'sustained reprisals' which will permit us to apply military pressures in the manner and at times and places of our choosing. We must build a bridge between 'tit-for-tat,' and 'sustained reprisal.'" This bridge was already being built and was the path by which the United States crossed from Pleiku and Qui Nhon to ROLLING THUNDER.⁹

ROLLING THUNDER

On 12 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed CINCPAC to develop "as a matter of urgency" reprisal plans which had three attack options: Option I - Vu Con Barracks, Quang Khe Naval Base, Xom Bang Ammo Depot; Option II - Option I plus Phu Van Supply Depot, Vinh Son Supply Depot, Phu Qui Ammo Depot; Option III - Option II plus Thanh Hoa Bridge, Thien Linh Dong Support, Phu Van Ammo Depot E. Certain weather-alternate targets included radar sites, barracks and an airfield. On 16 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved for planning purposes a somewhat different group of options covering generally the same targets but in a different order of priority.¹⁰ Slightly later on the same day the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to CINCPAC the "illustrative 8-week program of military action against low risk targets in North Vietnam," which they said was being "discussed at the highest levels." This was the air strike program that they had recommended to the Secretary of Defense on 11 February. Admitting that this program was intended only as a guide and could well be drastically revised, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told CINCPAC that they were interested in interdicting the Hanoi-Vinh railway, roads, highway bridges, ferries and radar and telecommunication facilities. "From our preliminary analysis," they said, "we

9. (S) JCS 0531-65 to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, 11 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 65.

10. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 5095 to CINCPAC, 12 Feb 65; 5332, 16 Feb 65.

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have concluded that the LOC net should not be attacked until we are authorized to go to the 20th Parallel, but the program on this category of target should be initiated early before AA defenses increase." They wanted no piecemeal attacks on the radars and telecommunications, but a complete, systematic and integrated attack.¹¹

On 13 February the Department of State informed Ambassador Taylor that the President had approved a program of "measured and limited" air actions to be carried out jointly with the GVN against selected military targets in NVN. For the time being these targets would all be located south of the 19th Parallel. It was expected that these attacks would take place only once or twice a week with two or three targets being hit on each day of operations.¹²

Concurrent with US bombing of the North an approach would be made to the United Nations to make clear that Hanoi was the aggressor and that the United States was "ready and eager" for talks to bring the aggression in RVN to an end. Ambassador Taylor was instructed to go at once to the GVN and seek its agreement to the US program. Anticipating, perhaps, some reluctance on the part of the GVN to come out publicly in favor of negotiating an end to the war, the State Department reminded Taylor to assure the RVN that this was actually for the purposes of putting the GVN/US side in a stronger diplomatic position than would be the case if they waited for a third party to urge them to the conference table. He could tell the GVN that the United States was determined to continue with its military actions regardless of any Security Council deliberations or ensuing "talks" unless and until Hanoi brought its aggression to an end. "Our demand will be that they cease infiltration and all forms of support and also the activity they are directing in the South," the Department of State explained.

ROLLING THUNDER Falters

In direct extension of the planning message calling for reprisal strikes that had gone to CINCPAC on 16 February, the

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11. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5349 to CINCPAC, 16 Feb 65.
 12. (~~TS~~) Msg, State 1718 to Saigon, 13 Feb 65.

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Joint Chiefs of Staff on 18 February sent him an execute order directing US air strikes on 20 February against Quang Khe Naval Base and, if weather forced a transfer of targets, against Vinh Linh and Vit Thu Barracks. The RVNAF with US support would strike Vu Con Barracks or, if weathered out, Dong Hoi airfield. The nickname of this reprisal strike was to be ROLLING THUNDER I (RT I).¹³

A coup d'etat against the GVN began at 1300 Saigon time on 19 February. Among the developments connected with this abortive attempt to seize power, General Ky, standing by General Khanh for the moment, threatened to use the RVNAF to bomb Tan Son Nhut airbase where rebel forces were concentrated. General Westmoreland prevailed upon Ky in "the strongest terms" to "put aside such nonsense." Although the coup fell through and the RVNAF did not bomb its own fields, it was obvious that bombing NVN on 20 February was now out of the question. Admiral Sharp called Washington on 19 February and recommended the postponement of ROLLING THUNDER I. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with his recommendation, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff called off RT I on the same day.¹⁴

Because of the postponement General Wheeler asked CINCPAC if he felt the operation had been compromised and whether or not targets for US strikes should be changed. CINCPAC, however, considered it highly unlikely that US targets had been compromised by the delay.¹⁵

The strikes were rescheduled for Monday, 22 February, and a warning order for RT II was sent to CINCPAC on 20 February.¹⁶ On the next day RT II was slipped back to 23 February. One day later, because the effects of the coup still lingered, RT II was postponed to 24 February.¹⁷ On 23 February COMUSMACV

13. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5555 to CINCPAC, 18 Feb 65.

14. (S) Msgs, Saigon 2654 and 2671 to State, 19 Feb 65;

(TS-GP 3) JCS 5572 to CINCPAC, 19 Feb 65.

15. (TS) NMCC Telecon, Wheeler to Sharp and Westmoreland, item 004, 191542Z Feb 65.

16. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5606 to CINCPAC, 20 Feb 65.

17. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5700 to CINCPAC, 22 Feb 65.

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learned that the RVNAF was still on alert. His air staff notified him that the VNAF pilots were not in acceptable physical condition to fly in RT II and recommended a 24 hour postponement. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, upon being advised by General Westmoreland, changed the execution date again to 25 February.¹⁸

On 24 February RT II was cancelled and a new mission, RT III, substituted for execution on 26 February. This mission was, in turn, cancelled and RT IV directed on the same date.¹⁹ These two cancellations stemmed from bad weather conditions over the target area. A modification to the RT IV warning order was directed on 26 February with strikes set for 27 February.²⁰ With dreary monotony a further change in the date of RT IV was directed on 26 February and the air strikes ordered for Sunday, 28 February.²¹

On 27 February General Wheeler notified Admiral Sharp that at a meeting with the President on the evening of 26 February it had been recognized that RT IV probably could not be executed on 27 February because of bad weather. However, the bombings would take place on 28 February or as soon thereafter as weather permitted. On the same day he told Admiral Sharp that he would be receiving shortly a new warning order for a strike to be executed at first daylight on 1 March. He did not believe that the strike would take place because higher authority would cancel it owing to a communist conclave to begin in Moscow on that same day. It could well be postponed to 2 or 3 March. The Chairman noted also that "... we propose to use B-52's against U.S. primary target, Xom Bang Ammo depot."²²

On 28 February still more changes took place with the date of the attack being changed to 1 March and, later in the day, to 2 March. The designation of the operation was changed

18. (TS-GP 3) NMCC Telecon, COMUSMACV to JCS, 230945Z Feb 65; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5711 to CINCPAC, 23 Feb 65.

19. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 5776 and 5791 to CINCPAC, 24 Feb 65.

20. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5948 to CINCPAC, 26 Feb 65.

21. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6048 to CINCPAC, 26 Feb 64.

22. (TS) Msg, JCS 0736-65 to CINCPAC, 27 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 65. (TS) Msg, CJCS unnumbered to CINCPAC, 27 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

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to RT V and the primary US target changed from Quang Khe Naval Base to Xom Bang Ammo Depot. The VNAF was assigned the naval base as a primary target.²³

Aerial reconnaissance in support of the proposed ROLLING THUNDER program was authorized for planning purposes on 26 February under the nickname BLUE TREE. CINCPAC was told that he should start plans for conducting medium level reconnaissance using six aircraft, mainly along key transportation routes south of the 19th Parallel in NVN. On the next day authorization to execute the reconnaissance flights concurrently and in conjunction with RT IV was sent to CINCPAC by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This authority was extended to RT V.²⁴

The execute order for the first RT strike actually conducted against NVN, RT V, was issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 1 March. CINCPAC was authorized to strike the designated targets on 2 March "during daylight hours . . . if, but only if, US and VNAF primary targets can both be struck." If weathered out, "execute strikes against primary or alternate targets during daylight" on the following day. CINCSAC was at the same time advised that his B-52 forces would not take part in the strikes against NVN but that rather the PACOM forces, USAF planes from Thailand bases, would be used. The operations from these fields would be coordinated with the US Ambassador in Thailand. Optional ordnance, excluding napalm, would be used against the ammunition depot and the naval base.²⁵

The first ROLLING THUNDER strike was carried out successfully on 2 March with 111 USAF planes and 19 VNAF planes attacking Xom Bang Ammo Depot and Quang Khe Naval Base respectively. The US strikes destroyed at least 75 percent of the depot with the VNAF strikes accounting for at least two gunboats at the naval base. Both forces encountered heavy antiaircraft fire. The VNAF lost 1 A-1H while the USAF lost two F-100s and three F-105s.²⁶

23. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 6069 and 6075 to CINCPAC,
28 Feb 65.
24. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 5959 to CINCPAC, 26 Feb 65;
JCS 6043, 27 Feb 65; JCS 6071, 28 Feb 65.
25. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6091 to CINCPAC, 1 Mar 65.
26. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMS 49-65 and 50-65, 2 and
3 Mar 65.

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Command and Relationship Problems

The complex nature of what Admiral Sharp had called a "joint and combined operation" posed many problems for US planners, not the least of which was the special relationship of COMUSMACV with the VNAF. In recognition of this, General Westmoreland, on the eve of RT V, had posed some interesting, speculative questions to General Wheeler and Admiral Sharp, more by way of bringing the problem to their attention than in expectation of any quick or easy solution. He pointed out for example that it would be most difficult to continue the "pretext of partnership" with the GVN if target selection, attack timing and force levels for the VNAF were decided in Washington. It was essential that the GVN have a sense of substantive participation in the attack planning and that there be a mutual spirit of trust between the respective planners and commanders. "How can one rationalize a Washington decision that the VNAF will be limited to 16 strike aircraft on a given target when General Ky judges 24 the proper number?" General Westmoreland asked.²⁷

He wanted to know also how much authority he had to disclose strike information to the VNAF commanders through the 2d Air Division and for telling the VNAF of warning orders with respect to US plans and intentions. He pointed out that that the VNAF had some things to do themselves before taking off on strikes. They should be notified at least 24 hours in advance of TOT as a minimum and, more desirable yet, they should be given planning details 48 hours in advance. GVN planners should have a comprehensive picture of the entire operation of which they were to be a part within not less than 24 hours.

On the matter of cancellations of strike because of weather, a very important factor in view of the heavy rains common to Vietnam during the monsoon season, General Westmoreland wanted to be granted the authority to go or not to go locally. Washington decisions on weather, which was many thousands of miles away and which could change more swiftly than communications could keep up with it, seemed to him wasteful and sometimes dangerous. He also asked if there

27. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 1061 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 1 Mar 65, OJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

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were some way "in which procedures and delegation of authority can be combined" to reduce the fatigue factor for highly placed commanders in Vietnam. Under current rules these men had to be constantly on the alert, which was nonproductive over the long pull. "At this end of the line," he said, "this situation inhibits vital trips to the field by myself and my key staff, repeatedly interrupts other equally essential work on pacification and counterinsurgency matters, and induces an unnecessary degree of stress on senior officials here who on one hand want to leave no stone unturned in preparation for reprisals, and on the other, want to minimize nonproductive preparations in operational units occasioned by changing plans."

COMUSMACV asked also what possible initiative he might have in Saigon with respect to "orchestrating" the graduated reprisal program with the actions being taken against NVN in other programs such as BARREL ROLL and OPLAN 34A actions. In these latter programs the decision to take actions was made in Washington or Honolulu with the "how" being left to COMUSMACV. "Experience indicates that the more remote the authority which directs how a mission is to be accomplished, the more we are vulnerable to mishaps resulting from such things as incomplete briefings and preparation, loss of tactical flexibility and lack of tactical coordination."

General Wheeler made a personal, immediate reply to Westmoreland, telling him that "we here recognize the policy and procedural difficulties" imposed on COMUSMACV and on the GVN by the "close control of ROLLING THUNDER exercised by Washington." For this reason General Wheeler did not intend to try to answer the several questions but to address the whole range of problems by assuring Westmoreland that the JCS and the Secretary of Defense were doing their best to clear away the hindrances and restrictions. He wanted COMUSMACV to be very clear on the point that there were "sizable and vexing" domestic and international political problems inherent in US military operations against NVN. Washington authorities were having to steer a careful course which would lead to the greatest possible effect on the enemy both in and out of RVN while keeping at a minimum the chances of bringing the Chinese Communist into open battle. The weather, Mr. Kosygin's visit to Hanoi, and the international communist conference taking place in Moscow had increased the difficulty of the existing

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political problems and had adversely affected the ROLLING THUNDER program.²⁸

As to the future, General Wheeler reminded General Westmoreland that when BARREL ROLL and YANKEE TEAM had first started they too were subjected to over-restrictive caveats. But as time went on many of these restrictions were lifted. The JCS were working toward setting up for ROLLING THUNDER a procedure similar to that employed in BARREL ROLL and YANKEE TEAM, with a previously approved bank of targets from which commanders in the field, using their own special knowledge of weather and operational factors could choose targets to strike. "In this connection," the Chairman stated, "it is most important to get off this next ROLLING THUNDER to break what seems to be a psychological/political log jam."

Use of Napalm

In the early missions against NVN napalm was not authorized. Even before the first RT strike was authorized, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force objected, on 17 February, that this restriction deprived US airmen of a very useful and legitimate weapon. He pointed out that US planes would be safest coming in at low altitudes and that in this situation, napalm was extremely effective. It could reduce the number of sorties needed to destroy "soft" targets such as parked aircraft, buildings, vehicles, unprotected personnel, fuel storage areas and radar-directed antiaircraft sites. Napalm was already being used against the VC in RVN and he felt that it should be used against targets in NVN.²⁹

The State Department was known to oppose the use of napalm in Southeast Asia, basing its opposition on the idea that napalm was a terror weapon and that adverse reaction resulted from both friendly and neutral governments because of its use. For example, napalm was not being used in Laos, largely at the behest of the British Government. The Chief of Staff of the Army suggested, however, that the time was appropriate to raise the issue of the use of napalm in NVN with the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State.³⁰

28. (28) Msg, JCS 0739-65 to COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, 1 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

29. (28-GP 1) CSAFM-B-80-65 to JCS 17 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/526, JMF 9155.3 (12 Feb 65).

30. (28-GP 1) CSAM 66-65 to JCS, 12 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/526, same file.

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In a memorandum embracing much of the information furnished them by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force on the use of napalm, its qualities and the techniques of its employment, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 25 February recommended to the Secretary of Defense that napalm be used against NVN. When CINCPAC determined that napalm would increase the effectiveness of the strike force and/or result in a lower probability of friendly losses, or that targets were so located that collateral damage to noncombatant life and property would be minimized, or that targets were particularly vulnerable to napalm, he should be authorized to use it.³¹

Secretary of Defense McNamara supported the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and on 9 March President Johnson approved the use of napalm in ROLLING THUNDER strikes against NVN.³²

ROLLING THUNDER-Relaxation of Restrictions

From confused and modest beginnings ROLLING THUNDER, the controlled and selective bombing of military and military-associated targets in NVN, grew into one of the keystones of the US strategy for winning the war in Vietnam. It was to become also one of the prime issues in later acrimonious debate over US policy in Vietnam. Regardless of the precedent set by the Tonkin Gulf, Pleiku, and Qui Nhon reprisals, deliberate bombing, without waiting for a specific provocation, marked a definite change in US policy. Whether NVN leaders "got the message" that the United States was determined to stop their support of the insurgencies was not discernible from their reactions. Those who expected spectacular political reaction did not see it at once. During March the United States continued to bomb limited military targets in NVN. Hanoi did not quit, RVN did not join ranks behind its leaders, Red China did not intervene, Moscow did not sever relations with the United States, and the American public gave little sign that it appreciated the depth of the latest change in policy. Although tight restrictions remained a burden to

31. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-127-65 to SecDef, 25 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2343/526-1), JMF 9155.3 (12 Feb 65).

32. (TS) Memo to SecDef from ASD(ISA) "Use of Napalm Against North Vietnamese Targets (S)," 9 Mar 65, w/marginal notation by SecDef, Att to JCS 2343/526-1, JMF 9155.3 (12 Feb 65).

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ROLLING THUNDER, the trend toward gradual relaxation of the rules wherever possible became apparent early in the program..

On 9 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered CINCPAC to carry out RT 6 during daylight on 11 March. The primary US target was the Phu Qui Ammo Depot (#40) north of the 19th Parallel, the primary VNAF target the military barracks at Vit Thu Lu (#36). Two US weather alternates, three VNAF weather alternates were established. Weather interfered and RT 6 was set back to 13 March. Because General Ky said that his pilots were "not in operational posture" the bombing did not actually take place until 14 March.³³ However, US planes took part only in support of the VNAF strikes since the US primary target was weathered out and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had, in the meantime, ordered US commanders not to strike their alternate targets. On 15 March, US planes finally bombed their primary target, Phu Qui Ammunition Depot.³⁴

By this time it was fairly apparent to everyone, including the enemy, that the US bombing program was controlled and that it was intended to be systematic. But it was proving to be far from a dynamic and stunning blow to the enemy. A combination of bad luck, an erratic ally, and long-range control had resulted in the expenditure of a great deal of effort and expense with only marginal results.

On 13 March Ambassador Taylor in a cable to the State Department criticized the decision to hold back the US effort on RT 6 until the primary target could be struck. He said ". . . we may be attaching too much importance to striking Target 40 because of its intrinsic military value as a target. If we support the thesis (as I do) that the really important target is the will of the leaders in Hanoi, virtually any target north of the 19th parallel will convey the necessary message at this juncture as well as Target 40. Meanwhile, through repeated delays we are failing to give the mounting crescendo to ROLLING THUNDER which is necessary to get the desired results."³⁵

33. (S) Msg, JCS 6703 to CINCPAC, 9 Mar 65. (S) Msg, JCS 7017 to CINCAL et al., 13 Mar 65.

34. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7025 to CINCPAC, 13 Mar 65; (S-NOFORN-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 7035 and 7042, to CINCAL et al., 15 Mar 65.

35. (S) Msg, Saigon 2949 to State, 13 Mar 65.

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On the next day, the Chief of Staff of the Army, who had just returned from an inspection tour in RVN, told the Secretary of Defense "To date the tempo of punitive air strikes has been inadequate to convey a clear sense of U.S. purpose to the DRV." He called for an increase in the scope and tempo of US air strikes against NVN. He admitted that such action could escalate and broaden the war but it could also achieve the US objective of causing Hanoi to cease its support and direction of the VC.³⁶

He also took action to secure the removal of some of the "self-imposed restrictions" on ROLLING THUNDER. He noted that these restrictions had severely reduced the effectiveness of air strikes and had made it impossible to approach the goal of four missions each week. The particular restrictions that he recommended be removed at once were: 1) the requirement that a US strike be conducted concurrently with a VNAF strike; 2) the requirement that US planes strike only the primary target; 3) the ban on use of classified ammunition; 4) the narrow geographical limits imposed on target selection; 5) the requirement to obtain specific Washington approval before striking alternate targets when primary targets were not available because of weather or other local conditions. The President, on 15 March, approved removal of these restrictions. However, the ban on classified ammunition was not automatically removed; each specific request from CINCPAC for use of classified ammunition would be reviewed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.³⁷

The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed CINCPAC on 16 March that during the meeting with the President the day before it was "announced" that at present the United States would avoid operations in NVN that would be likely to result in air clashes with MIGs in the Hanoi area. General Wheeler interpreted this to mean that, for the time being, air strikes must not be mounted north of the 20th Parallel. On 16 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff modified BLUE TREE instructions to read: "Conduct daily BLUE TREE type reconnaissance over NVN south of the 20th Parallel." They authorized combat air patrol (CAP) for these missions but directed

36. (28) Memo, CSA to SecDef et al., no sub., with attached Report On Survey of the Military Situation in Vietnam 14 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65. See Ch. 19 for more on General Johnson's report and Presidential action thereon.

37. (28-GP 1) DJSM-379-65 to CJCS, 27 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

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that if MIG aircraft were sighted the mission would withdraw. Escorting fighters would engage the MIGs only if necessary to protect the reconnaissance planes.³⁸

On 16 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to carry out the next block of ROLLING THUNDER strikes, RT 7, during daylight hours between 19 and 25 March. This marked a new feature of the program with strikes authorized on a weekly basis so that bombings could be executed any time during the seven day period during daylight. Another innovation introduced with RT 7 was the inclusion of authority for US and VNAF planes to perform armed route reconnaissance along selected, limited segments of Route 1 in NVN as well as striking designated primary or alternate fixed targets.³⁹

General Johnson's return from RVN, his recommendations for improvement of the situation there, and the top-level meeting with the President on 15 March, gave a new impetus to ROLLING THUNDER planning. On 17 March the Chief of Staff of the Air Force pointed out that the President had expressed an "urgent desire" to reverse the trend of events in Southeast Asia. General McConnell took the position that this could be accomplished only by the immediate and more forceful application of US military power against NVN. He believed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff must come up with a method for attacking and destroying the "source of DRV strength," and he presented them with a plan developed by the USAF staff which would, he believed, accomplish this. This plan was basically an air and naval offensive to destroy vulnerable resources of the enemy outside RVN and a stepped up campaign in the RVN to destroy his strength there. Concentrated air-strikes would begin immediately in the southern part of NVN, then move northward at intervals of 2-6 days until Hanoi itself would be bombed. As these were taking place other forces would be deployed to Southeast Asia to secure the necessary logistic facilities and to support the ARVN in its counterinsurgency operations.⁴⁰

38. (TS) Msg, JCS 0936-65 to CINCPAC, 16 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 65. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 7185 to CINCPAC, 16 Mar 65.

39. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7167 to CINCPAC, 16 Mar 67.

40. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM J-78-65 to JCS, 17 Mar 65, JCS 2343/549, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).

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Before action could be taken on the Chief of Staff of the Air Force's memorandum, the Secretary of Defense, in discussion with the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 20 March, asked that a 12 week air-strike program be developed for his consideration. He directed that air attacks on NVN be planned to avoid heavily populated areas and that they avoid direct attacks against airfields in NVN. The J-3 developed such a program and briefed the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and visiting Admiral Sharp, on 22 March.

After studying the proposed 12 week program at greater length, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 27 March that they did not subscribe to all of the Joint Staff's recommendations. The initial phase of the proposed program called for three weeks of interdiction of NVN LOCs south of the 20th Parallel, including the destruction of key bridges and intense armed reconnaissance. The second phase called for interdiction strikes north of the 20th Parallel, including strikes against radar and LOC targets in depth throughout NVN north of the 20th Parallel.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary that, while they were willing to recommend the staff's proposals for bombing NVN LOCs south of the 20th Parallel during the third, fourth and fifth week of the on-going program, they had definite reservations for the remaining weeks in which US planes would strike more deeply into NVN. They had instead directed a study of alternatives for a follow-on bombing program beginning with the sixth week.

Reflecting COMUSMACV's views on the need for better procedures and greater delegation of authority, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary of Defense that they believed the operational commander must have "flexibility in the execution of this military program in order to achieve a high degree of effectiveness." They affirmed that it was important that the field commander be able to detect and exploit targets of opportunity through frequent random reconnaissance operations.⁴¹

Earlier, the JCS had agreed that the Chief of Staff of the Air Force's concept for bombing NVN should be referred

⁴¹. (IS-GP 3) JCSM-221-65 to SecDef, 27 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/551), JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).

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to the Service planners for consideration during the development of a proposed program of "optimum military actions" against NVN to follow the completion of the current remaining five weeks of bombing NVN. The J-3 should also consider the paper in his consideration of alternatives for a "follow-on program of air strikes" beginning with the 6th week of ROLLING THUNDER.⁴²

In extension of this planning the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked CINCPAC for his views on 27 March. On 3 April, Admiral Sharp recommended a wide-ranging armed reconnaissance program sustained at the maximum feasible level of sorties, as well as strikes against important and varied types of targets south of 20° N. Further, he proposed that after completion of this program, operations be extended north against meaningful military targets, but avoiding the Hanoi and Haiphong areas.⁴³

His views were considered along with those of the Chief of Staff of the Air Force in the preparation of a proposed memorandum for the Secretary of Defense. The draft memorandum by the Joint Staff included a proposal for a four week program of increasing intensity that would have moved the air strike effort north of the 20° N by 30 April and would include an attack on the important POL storage areas at Haiphong.

The Chief of Staff of the Army, however, took strong exception to the memorandum. While he agreed that the scope and intensity of US air strikes should increase, he wanted more gradual increases and particularly did not want strikes moved above 20° N "during this time period." Too little time had gone by to evaluate properly the results and effects of ROLLING THUNDER. And he was more than a little concerned over the possibilities of invoking Chinese intervention by operations close to the Chinese border. "I believe that frequent and random day and night armed reconnaissance below the 20th Parallel designed to insure maximum interdiction and disruption of the LOC into Laos and RVN should be the key element of the air strike

42. (TS) Amended Note to Control Div, "JCS 2343/549 - Concept for North Viet Nam (U)," 26 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).

43. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/551-1, 14 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65). (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 040304Z Apr 65, JCS IN 91149.

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program," the Chief of Staff of the Army declared. The Joint Chiefs of Staff referred the staff report to the J-3 as an input for further studies and did not send the proposed memorandum to the Secretary of Defense.⁴⁴

The USAF and USN attacks against primary targets in RT 7 were launched as scheduled on 19 March with other attacks by the VNAF and the route armed reconnaissance taking place in the ensuing week.

US planners turned their attention to the enemy's radar systems in RT 8, which was scheduled for the period 26 March-1 April. The primary targets that CINCPAC was authorized on 24 March comprised a package of radar sites to be struck by US aircraft. Destruction of enemy radar systems and installations could pave the way for expanded bombing at lower cost. The VNAF was assigned barracks and an airfield as targets. Additionally, US pilots were authorized to carry out armed reconnaissance against NVN patrol craft along the coast of NVN and around the offshore islands of Hon Matt and Ile du Tigre. VNAF armed reconnaissance was authorized along a portion of Route 12.⁴⁵ CINCPAC made an effort to improve the efficiency of the scheduled VNAF strikes by requesting authority to send reconnaissance planes over VNAF targets before the strikes. The Joint Chiefs of Staff lacked authority to give him this permission. They therefore turned down his request but assured him that they would attempt to secure such approval in future RT programs. On the other hand, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had secured authority for low-level reconnaissance of the radar targets to be struck by US planes and had passed it on to CINCPAC.⁴⁶

The strikes against the radar sites continued over a period of several days and, after only limited success in the first strikes, succeeded in destroying part of the enemy's radar system. The VNAF made a highly successful strike against Dong Hoi airfield in their part of RT 8. US pilots accompanying the VNAF in a support role took occasion on the flight back from the target area to sink several NVN boats.⁴⁷

44. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/551-1, 14 Apr 65; 1st N/H of JCS 2343/551-1, 20 Apr 65; JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).

45. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7672 to CINCPAC, 24 Mar 65.

46. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 7699 to CINCPAC, 24 Mar 65; CINCPAC to JCS, 251321Z Mar 65; JCS 7787 to CINCPAC, 25 Mar 65; CINCPAC to JCS, 240900Z Mar 65.

47. (TS-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUMs 28-31 Mar 65.

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Ambassador Taylor, who visited Washington, D. C. in the last few days of March, observed to the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the tempo of ROLLING THUNDER had now reached a "good" level. He believed that target detection should move north and work back and forth across the various target systems. He stated that a program of low-level reconnaissance should be started to build up a bank of current intelligence in advance of the strikes. The Ambassador also said that Haiphong harbor should be mined by the VNAF at an early date. He also wanted a "prestige" bridge at Thanh Hoa destroyed by bombing, with other bridges connecting NVN with Communist China also being struck eventually. He did not believe that MIGs at Phuc Yen had the capability to interfere with ROLLING THUNDER to the extent that had been estimated. Secretary of Defense McNamara agreed with Ambassador Taylor on the need for low-level reconnaissance and directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to collaborate with his office in developing a blanket request for CINCPAC to conduct unescorted, low-level reconnaissance anywhere in NVN. Among the guidelines which he furnished was the dictum that the reconnaissance planes must avoid the MIG patrol areas, Hanoi, and Haiphong. He agreed that in about 4 to 12 weeks the mining of Haiphong harbor should have become "politically feasible," and in about 12 weeks he hoped to secure agreement on bombing the two main bridges connecting NVN with China. He felt that this would bring very strong pressure on NVN.⁴⁸

In a general assessment of ROLLING THUNDER, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed the Secretary of Defense on 6 April that these air strikes had not reduced the overall military capabilities of NVN in "any major way." The attacks had destroyed some Army supplies and ammunition stocks but had not inflicted any critical loss on the NVN capability for military operations. General Wheeler believed that the most damaging blow had been the destruction of the bridges at Thanh Hoa, Dong Phuong, and Dong Hoi, which slowed down logistical support of the southern portion of NVN. He felt that further strikes against LOCs leading south of the 29th Parallel would cause a "serious stricture" to NVN logistical support to the south, including that sent into RVN and Laos.

48. (28) Note to Control Div, "The Meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense with Ambassador Taylor (U)," 29 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

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The enemy in NVN was building up his air defense, thereby increasing his costs in manpower and detracting from his economy. Outwardly, however, the NVN government appeared to be uninfluenced by US/VNAF air strikes. "In summary," General Wheeler told the Secretary of Defense, "I think it is fair to state that our strikes to date, while damaging, have not curtailed DRV military capabilities in any major way. The same is true as regards the North Vietnamese economy. The North Vietnamese people exhibit an understandable degree of apprehension for the future. The Hanoi Government continues to maintain, at least publicly, stoical determination."

49. (S) CM-534-65 to SecDef, 6 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3
(3 Apr 65).

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Chapter 19

LIMITED DEPLOYMENT OF US FORCES

Protecting US bases and installation in the RVN against enemy attack, long a matter of concern to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had become even more urgent with the launching of the first bombing reprisals against NVN. As decisions for even greater pressures against NVN were taken in February 1965, culminating in ROLLING THUNDER, the security of the US bases and forces in the RVN caused growing anxiety at high levels of the US Government and resulted in progressively more positive actions to insure the safety and integrity of the US military establishment in the South.

Steps to Improve Security of US Forces

In connection with the Tonkin Gulf reprisals, US officials had considered sending combat troops to the RVN specifically to protect US bases and personnel. General Westmoreland had rejected the idea, holding that too many US battalions would be needed to secure adequately all major US installations in RVN. The presence of large numbers of US troops might cause the GVN to lose interest in defending bases and to relax even further its already lax security measures. Moreover, there would be language and jurisdiction problems.¹

By February 1965, however, General Westmoreland had changed his mind. The deepening pattern of VC violence directed specifically at US forces and installations, dramatized by the major attack against Pleiku, had convinced him that the war had reached a new plateau--one on which Americans were in great danger. ARVN control in three of the four Corps Tactical Zones (CTZ) was deteriorating rapidly. On 9 February COMUSMACV stated that it might be necessary to send in US combat forces of at least division strength to protect US personnel and

1. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-121-65 to SecDef 20 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2343/525-1), JMF 9155.3 (11 Feb 65). A study by the Army Staff estimated that 44 battalions, or 4 plus divisions, would be needed to defend the 240 US bases, large and small in RVN.

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installations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff immediately pressed for precise judgments on the number and types of US troops that would be needed.²

General Westmoreland informed Admiral Sharp and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 17 February that the United States could no longer count on the RVNAF to protect US installations and personnel. He listed, in priority, those areas where US combat forces were needed: 1) Da Nang; 2) the Saigon/Bien Hoa/Vung Tau complex; and 3) the Nha Trang/Cam Ranh Bay area. Admiral Sharp agreed with the judgment and so informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff.³

Both commanders considered the US base at Da Nang to be the keystone of the US effort against NVN. Such programs as YANKEE TEAM, BARREL ROLL, and the OPLAN 34A depended heavily on this base for support. CINCPAC called it a likely target for the enemy and doubted the ability of the RVNAF to stop a serious enemy effort to seize it. The VC already had the capability to sabotage the Da Nang airfield, to attack it with 57mm recoilless rifles and mortars, or to attack it in battalion strength. Admiral Sharp said that it was important for the United States to act rather than react against this enemy threat. If the United States moved quickly to place adequate US combat forces in the area, it could deter an attack. But if it waited for a tragedy to occur, the reaction would have to be much greater in order to restore the security of the area. CINCPAC could readily furnish combat forces since two Marine Battalion Landing Teams (BLTs) were off the coast of RVN at the moment and could quickly be built to Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) strength by air and sea lift. He recommended that a MEB be deployed at once to the Da Nang area. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had, in connection with the eight week program, recommended accelerated deployment of the MEB. On 20 February they again recommended to the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum that the MEB be sent to the RVN at a total strength, including command and control elements, of about 8,500 men and officers. In order to reconstitute a Special Landing Force (SLF) Afloat when the MEB was deployed ashore, they recommended that a Marine Brigade from Hawaii be sent to the Western Pacific.⁴

2. Ibid.

3. (SS-GP 1) Msgs, COMUSMACV 0712 to CINCPAC, 17 Feb 65; CINCPAC to JCS, 180210Z Feb 65.

4. (SS-GP 1) JCSM-121-65 to SecDef, 18 Feb 65, (derived from JCS 2343/525-1), JMF 9155.3 (11 Feb 65).

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The JCS noted that as a bonus of the deployment to the Da Nang area, "our readiness posture for other contingencies in a strategically sensitive area of Southeast Asia will be significantly improved." The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary that additional measures were under study and that they would send him further recommendations.⁵

Ambassador Taylor informed Washington authorities on 22 February that he and General Westmoreland had agreed that there was no need to deploy US combat troops to RVN except to Da Nang. He had strong reservations on basing "any considerable number" of Marines at Da Nang and thus revising the long-standing US policy of keeping US ground combat troops out of the RVN. Once this policy was breached it would be very difficult to hold the line. The GVN would seek to unload other ground force tasks on the United States. The presence of US combat forces would breed friction with the local population. Conflicts would arise with the RVNAF on command relations. Ambassador Taylor also pointed out that the French had tried, and failed, to defeat the Viet Minh guerrillas. "White-faced soldier armed, equipped and trained as he is, is not suitable guerrilla fighter for Asian forests and jungles," Taylor declared. He doubted that US forces would do any better than had the French. "When I view this array of difficulties, I am convinced that we should adhere to our past policy of keeping our ground forces out of direct counterinsurgency role," Taylor said. Ambassador Taylor appreciated, however, General Westmoreland's concern for the safety of Da Nang and was willing to go along with the introduction of a Marine BLT to strengthen the base against overt assault.⁶

General Westmoreland on the same day asked that one BLT land at Da Nang as soon as possible to protect construction workers at the site of the HAWK battery and to secure the battery when in place. He asked also that, following this landing, a second BLT be sent in to provide inner perimeter security at Da Nang airfield. No tactical aircraft need be brought in, and the third BLT of the MEB should not come ashore in the foreseeable future.⁷

For his part Admiral Sharp informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 24 February that he considered the entire MEB must be landed at Da Nang as an act of prudence, to be taken before, not after, tragedy occurred. He believed that the vulnerability

5. Ibid.

6. (28) Msg, Saigon 473 to JCS, 22 Feb 65, JCS IN 36860.

7. (28-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 5633 to CINCPAC, 23 Feb 65.

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of the US investment in Da Nang was as apparent to the enemy as it was to US authorities. With a strong mobile force around Da Nang providing a tight security for the airfield complex and good security for outlying installations, two ancillary benefits would emerge. First, the RVNAF would be encouraged to use its own troops for patrol and security operations; and second, the VC/NVA would have to regard Da Nang as a tougher target. Sharp wanted a jet attack squadron ashore, but was willing to have the deployments phased gradually. As first priority he wished a MEB command and control element, a surface BLT, and a helicopter squadron landed at once. Following this he wanted to build up ashore, using the US Marine security forces already at Da Nang to provide a second BLT. A third BLT would be landed when it could be effectively supported and employed.⁸

CINCPAC also asked that the deployment of the MEB be accompanied by deployment of one Marine F-4 squadron for close air support. He recommended that the Special Landing Force (SLF) be kept in the South China Sea on a 96 hour reaction time from RVN and that a MEB be moved from Hawaii to WESTPAC to replace the MEB landed at Da Nang.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff fully supported CINCPAC's recommendations and forwarded them, on the same day they were received, to the Secretary of Defense, urging that they be adopted. The only significant change they made to CINCPAC's recommendations was to ask for two squadrons of jet aircraft instead of one.⁹

On 26 February the President approved deployment of a helicopter squadron and two BLTs to Da Nang, but deferred decision on the movement of the remainder of the MEB, the command and support elements, and the jet squadrons.¹⁰

The deployment of the MEB was cleared by Ambassador Taylor with GVN Prime Minister Quat on 1 March. The two officials explicitly agreed that the United States could consider

8. (23-GP 1) Memo, J-3 to JCS, 24 Feb 65, Encl to JCS 2343/525-2, JMF 9155.3 (11 Feb 65).

9. (23-GP 1) JCSM-130-65 to SecDef, 24 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2343/525-2), JMF 9155.3 (11 Feb 65).

10. (23) Msg, JCS 0736-65 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 27 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

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that the GVN had requested these troops and that the United States was responding by furnishing them. On the next day General Westmoreland discussed the military details with Generals Thieu and Minh. The RVN officers expressed some concern that the civilian population in the area might react adversely to the introduction of the US Marines and agreed that these forces should be moved in as unobtrusively as possible to minimize the impact of their arrival. "The concern of the Vietnamese," General Westmoreland observed, "is that arrival of this large contingent of Americans could trigger demonstrations with overtones of cessation of hostilities and peace by negotiation."¹¹

On 7 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to land at once a surface BLT, a helicopter squadron with MEB command and control elements, and minimum logistic elements. These forces were to "marry up" with combat and service elements already in the RVN. A second BLT would be landed to build up the MEB to two BLT strength. The SLF would remain in the South China Sea. The mission of these Marine forces would be to occupy and defend critical terrain features in order to secure Da Nang airfield, landing beaches, and other US facilities in the area. The Marine force was specifically not to engage in day to day actions against the VC. Additional forces would not be deployed unless directed by the JCS. Both Marine BLTs landed on 8 March.¹²

In the meantime other measures were taken to improve the security situation for US personnel in the Saigon area. In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense the JCS recommended approval of a CINCPAC recommendation that a reduced strength US Army Military Police Battalion be sent at once to RVN. Deputy Secretary¹³ Vance approved deployment of the battalion on 18 February.

Changing the Role of US Forces

The bulk of Army and USAF units in RVN in February 1965 were combat support types. The United States did not intend,

11. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2798 to State, 1 Mar 65, JCS IN 45134. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC JOO 6394 to CINCPAC, 2 Mar 65, JCS IN 46032.

12. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 6580 to CINCPAC, 7 Mar 65. (S) Marine Corps Commandant's Vietnam Chronology.

13. (S-GP 4) JCSM-110-65 to SecDef, 16 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2343/524); (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 18 Feb 65, Att. to JCS 2343/524-1, JMF-9155.3 (22 Jan 65).

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as a matter of policy, that these units or the military advisors to the RVNAF should engage in direct combat with the VC. Nevertheless, there were indications as the VC made gains during the early months of 1965 that US authorities were thinking more and more in terms of using US forces in a direct combat role. Admiral Sharp set the stage for this type of approach when he told the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 26 February, "... we need a positive statement of national policy and, specifically, a command decision as to whether or not we are or will participate actively in the fighting in RVN, or whether we will continue to adhere to our long standing policy that this is a Vietnamese war and that we are only advisors." He pointed out that the recent decision to allow the use of US jets in RVN had openly involved the USAF in the war in RVN.¹⁴

At a meeting at the White House on the evening of 26 February the President made it clear that US policy was to do everything possible to "maximize" US military efforts to reverse the unfavorable situation in Vietnam. Among the military steps discussed in "an exploratory way" was the possibility of sending in more US advisors at the combat unit level, the provision of more helicopters for both surveillance and fire support, the increased use of US jet aircraft in RVN, and the use of US naval vessels to assist the RVN in preventing infiltration by sea.

To provide the President with the latest and best possible information as a basis for making additional decisions on these and other matters of US concern in Vietnam, the Secretary of Defense requested the Chief of Staff Army, General Johnson, to visit the RVN in early March. General Johnson visited RVN from 5 to 12 March to "evaluate the need for and nature of additional supporting actions" in Vietnam. He talked with Ambassador Taylor, principal members of the US Mission Team, and with all key RVN political and military leaders.¹⁵

Ambassador Taylor told General Johnson that the basic unresolved problem was the GVN's inability to protect its people. Unless the people were safe and realized it, all programs in the RVN were either impossible or ineffective. If they were protected adequately, all other problems could be solved in a reasonable length of time. Taylor charged that the

14. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 262155Z Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 65.

15. (S) Msg, JCS 0736-65 to CINCPAC, 27 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Mar 65.

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lack of progress in destroying the VC in the countryside stemmed from insufficient trained military, paramilitary and police forces, ineffective pacification programs resulting from GVN instability, and a popular apathy and dwindling morale--"the consequence of a long war with no end in sight."

Another primary concern, said Ambassador Taylor, was the growing strength of the VC. The RVN's open frontiers allowed infiltration, and the VC recruiting tactics were remarkably effective. The heart of the overall problem was the continued support of the VC from NVN. The only way to stop it apparently was by the application of military pressures on NVN.

Ambassador Taylor cited historical factors as a main reason for the GVN's instability. The country had no heritage of loyalty to a single government or leader, and US aid, no matter how massive, was not going to bring about quickly such loyalty or unity in the people. He told General Johnson that it was now necessary to explore remedial measures for the RVN's ailments and listed 13 specific areas in which this should be done. Among the military measures to be explored, were the use of US manpower to offset shortages in the RVNAF and an increased tempo for both BARREL ROLL and ROLLING THUNDER.¹⁶

General Westmoreland in talking with General Johnson had conceded that the initiative lay with the enemy. The communists had consolidated political gains in the countryside, had increased their military strength, and had improved their organization, weaponry and logistic capability. The people were becoming convinced of the inevitability of VC victory. RVNAF losses were widely publicized but those of the VC were kept quiet. Looking to the future, Westmoreland forecast an increased VC offensive throughout RVN, particularly in the northern and central parts of the country. He anticipated a buildup of VC strength and a regrouping of main force units into larger formations. The enemy's strategy would aim at isolating the RVNAF in pockets, and thus cutting them off from the population, their supplies, and communications. If present trends continued, with no new elements introduced, within six months the RVNAF would be essentially a series of "islands of strength" clustered

¹⁶, (78-GP 1) Memo, CSA to SecDef et al., 14 Mar 65.
OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

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around the District and Provincial capitals. The RVN would be jammed with refugees in a "generally subverted countryside." And pressure would grow for the GVN to negotiate a settlement with the VC.

General Westmoreland decried the lack of a strong GVN which made coordinated, effective national resistance to the VC impossible. The RVN had done remarkably well in sustaining any government at all, but had succeeded only because of the resiliency of the people and the lingering momentum of previous years.

This grim politico-military picture led him to the conclusion that "we are headed toward a VC take-over of the country, sooner or later, if we continue down the present road at the present level of effort. This collapse could take place within a year. On the other hand, the GVN, with US assistance, might be able to hold out in its major bases and province towns for several years."

COMUSMACV believed that the United States must, as a matter of policy, "buy time." The United States must prevent the ARVN from being defeated in open combat by committing its own air forces in direct support of the ARVN wherever it was threatened by superior VC forces, and United States naval forces should be used to stop the infiltration of ammunition and other bulk supplies to the VC by ocean-going vessels. Moreover, US ground forces in addition to the MEB at Da Nang, might be needed elsewhere in RVN "for identical purposes or indeed to prevent a collapse in some particular area at a critical time." He also called for additional measures to increase the US capability in target acquisition, research, and analysis. Other steps his staff was carefully considering were; 1) use of CBU-1 munitions and nonlethal chemical and biological agents; 2) addition of three more UH-1B helicopter companies, one to each corps (using the Marine squadron at Da Nang for one corps); 3) addition of FACs and observation aircraft to provide a "tailored company/squadron" for each corps; 4) addition of one-half squadron of C-130s for in-country airlift. He admitted that his suggestions, if adopted, would bring into being a new basic policy toward the war in RVN. The United States would be committed to do whatever was necessary militarily to prevent defeat. But in his mind steps already being taken pointed toward the evolution of a new policy. "If a policy of direct US support and involvement is announced and if the measures discussed above are taken," COMUSMACV stated, "it is entirely possible that the adverse trends would be reversed. The VC are not 10 feet tall; they have problems which must be formidable." 17

17. Ibid.

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In its impact upon US policy, General Johnson's report to the President ranked with General Taylor's report of 1961 to President Kennedy and with the Bundy report of the preceding month. In his written report General Johnson told the President substantially what Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland had said, although expanding on some of their views. He called for the adoption of measures by the United States under three categories: 1) measures to arrest the deterioration; 2) measures to free ARVN forces for offensive operations; 3) measures to contain infiltration by land.

Under the first category General Johnson proposed 21 specific military measures. These included introduction of more aircraft; removal of certain of the restrictions on ROLLING THUNDER (see Chapter 18); stepping up unconventional operations against NVN; expansion of US Seventh Fleet participation, particularly air, in the RVN; and a reorientation of BARREL ROLL to increase its effectiveness. He also suggested revision of procedures for funding and construction and other broad measures to build up the US base. These broad measures included acceleration of construction of jet airfields in RVN, increasing logistic support capability, and reorientation of this capability in RVN from north-south to east-west.¹⁸

Noting that the VC were tending more and more to attack in larger formations, frequently of one or more battalions, he also noted the need to free the ARVN from guard duties and to permit its employment along more suitable military lines. "... the time has come to decide," General Johnson declared, "how much the United States is willing to commit to the security of South Vietnam within South Vietnam. Consequently a clarification of US policy is required as to what we expect the Vietnamese to do for themselves and what the United States will provide as complementary forces." He then gave two suggested alternatives for deployment of a tailored division force which would free some ARVN units for offensive action against the VC in the critical II CTZ, the highlands areas of the RVN. The first was to deploy US combat units to take over security at the Bien Hoa/Tan Son Nhut airbase complex, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, and Pleiku. He did not feel that this action, which would free about six ARVN battalions and 25 RF companies, would be militarily sufficient, but judged it to be all that was "politically feasible within the US at this time"; his second alternative was to deploy US

18. Ibid.

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combat units into the provinces of Kontum, Pleiku, and Darlac, also in the II CTZ. This would allow the movement of two ARVN divisions and eleven ARVN battalions into the coastal regions of Binh Dinh, Phu Yen and Phu Bon provinces where the VC had recently increased their pressure significantly.

To stop infiltration, General Johnson suggested invoking the SEATO Treaty and establishing an International Force south of the 17th Parallel across Quang Tri Province and the panhandle of Laos to the Mekong. He further suggested, that if this was not feasible, a four division US force be placed in the same geographical area. He also made certain broad suggestions on changing funding procedures within RVN to facilitate programming and adaptation to the war that was going on. "Time is running out swiftly in Vietnam and temporizing or expedient measures will not suffice The United States possesses capabilities which, if applied with speed, vigor, and imagination, can redress the present military imbalance without excessive risk of widening the conflict." 19

The President met with Secretary of Defense McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the afternoon of 15 March for a climactic discussion of General Johnson's recommendations. The meeting was marked by close questioning concerning the situation in various areas of the RVN, the reasons for the overall deteriorating security situation, and measures which could be taken to stem and reverse the adverse trends.

On the next day General Wheeler, in a cable describing this meeting, stated that the President viewed the outlook as bleak, but "one which must and will be overcome." He had made it clear that the United States would provide anything that would improve the posture of the GVN and the US in Vietnam. He had approved, in principle, the 21 specific actions that General Johnson had said must be taken to arrest the deteriorating situation. 20

Four points, above and beyond those involved in General Johnson's recommendations, emerged from this meeting with the President. The President held the JCS responsible for the success of the war against the VC and he was currently dissatisfied with the progress being made. It now appeared to be

19. Ibid.

20. (S) Msg, JCS 0936-65 to CINCPAC, 16 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

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beyond the capabilities of the RVNAF to defeat the insurgents without direct participation of US combat units. The President appeared willing to provide whatever support was necessary to defeat the VC in the RVN. On the other hand he did not want to get more deeply involved with Communist China in the process, if this were avoidable.

General Wheeler also told Admiral Sharp that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were considering the two alternatives for deployment of US ground forces that General Johnson had included in his report. In addition, the thought had been advanced that a ROK division might also be involved as the nucleus of a SEATO force.

The Chairman also stated that General Greene, the Commandant, Marine Corps, had proposed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the United States establish a series of about six "beach heads" along the RVN coast from Da Nang south to the Delta, each to be occupied by US combat forces of appropriate size. General Greene had pointed out that access to these areas from the sea would insure their supply and support and would provide a means of withdrawal if needed.

General Wheeler noted that these proposals to use US combat forces would modify existing policy in that they would commit US troops, in force, against the enemy. To be workable, therefore, whichever proposal was approved would require some sort of combined US/GVN command. On reflection, General Wheeler concluded, "I find that many of the reasons supporting our past practices have lost validity in the light of the situation facing us in South Vietnam. In other words, I believe that we must reexamine our past policies, measure their validity against our performance and that of the enemy and modify them as needed to stem and reverse an adverse tide." 21

General Wheeler described the President's attitude as one of "stark determination to do everything possible to better our situation and to attain our objective of 'making these people leave their neighbors alone.'" 22

On 18 March General Westmoreland sought Ambassador Taylor's agreement to landing the third BLT of the MEB at Phu Bai. Taylor concurred despite his several reservations about the wisdom of this move. The Ambassador feared that this might be only the first of other moves that would commit more US combat forces in South Vietnam. He was keenly aware that the understrength RVNAF might have to be supplemented by foreign troops, and that commitment of a US division would shore up the badly deteriorating I and II CTZs, boost RVN civilian morale, and end talk that the United States was not serious in its efforts to help the RVN. Ambassador Taylor

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

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was also aware of the probable adverse effects of such a commitment. To send in US combat troops would increase US involvement, expose more US forces to danger, and invite greater losses. It would also raise sensitive questions of command, and might encourage the GVN to "let the United States do it." There were other disadvantages as well, but the total effect for good or bad could not be measured, according to Ambassador Taylor, until the possible missions for a US division were examined. There were two obvious possibilities, use of the division in the high plateau or in defending key enclaves along the coast. In the first instance, aside from easier operating conditions, the US troops could use their superior mobility and firepower effectively in cutting off infiltration. In the latter case they would be used in a "rather inglorious static defensive mission" operating in a heavily populated area and fragmented to the point that command and control could become awkward.²³

Ambassador Taylor had tentatively concluded that it would not be desirable to send a US division into RVN unless clear and tangible advantages outweighed the numerous disadvantages. The United States must determine how much of its own combat forces would close the manpower gap in RVN. Obviously the US division would make some contribution but it was not certain by any means that it would be enough to reverse the downward trend. If, on the other hand, the United States decided it would be worthwhile to send in the division, the best place for it would be in the highlands. This would be the more exposed position and "even permits one to entertain the possibility of a kind of Dien Bien Phu" if the VC cut off access to the coast by road.

The coastal enclave idea was safer and simpler even though less impressive and potentially less productive. Taylor wondered if the two deployment possibilities could not be combined in some way with the retention of a base coastal area, linked with a position inland.²⁴

Admiral Sharp, on 18 March, agreed with the Chief of Staff, Army's view that to move US troops into the Bien Hoa-Tan Son Nhut complex would be useful, but it would have to be carefully arranged with the GVN. As to other deployments, CINCPAC held that no US combat troops should be moved into the plateau

23. (TS) Msg, Saigon 3003 to State, 18 Mar 65, JCS IN 67403.

24. Ibid.

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area until Nha Trang and Qui Nhon, which were vital points of entry to the plateau from the coast, were fully secured. Any supply of US forces in the highlands should be by means other than air, which was undependable and already overtaxed. "U.S. assumption of responsibility for the defense of the provinces of Kontum, Pleiku and Darlac would position major combatant U. S. ground forces in a key area of Viet Cong interest and activity, and would impose major logistic problems," CINCPAC noted. It should not be started until the United States had assurance of full logistic support capabilities based on the coastal towns and was convinced it could keep the land LOCs open.²⁵

Even before they received CINCPAC's views, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at their meeting on 17 March 1965, directed the Joint Staff to develop, as a matter of priority, a plan for the employment of US and allied forces in a combat role in the RVN. The concept of the plan was to include a Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) in the Da Nang area, a US Army division force in the high plateau centering around Pleiku, and a ROK division force in the Bien Hoa-Vung Tau-Saigon area. Using this concept as a basis, the Joint Staff developed for the Joint Chiefs of Staff a draft memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, which contained recommendations for the specified deployments. The Chief of Staff, Air Force, did not agree. He said he did not believe the Joint Chiefs of Staff were ready to deploy an Army division to the Pleiku area. Although this had been discussed at the 17 March meeting, no decisions had been reached and there remained questions as to which units were to be deployed, the method of deployment, the concept of employment, and logistic support. In addition there was the question of military advisability of setting this division down in an area surrounded and controlled by the VC. He wanted the paper changed to show deployment of the Army division with supporting forces "to develop and expand additional coastal enclaves south of Da Nang to provide security for important installations and for counterinsurgency operations."²⁶

The Chief of Staff, Air Force, also proposed adding to the memorandum to the Secretary of Defense wording that would indicate a recommendation to increase the intensity and severity of ROLLING THUNDER and to deploy four of the nine squadrons called for in the eight week program on an accelerated basis.

25. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 180840Z Mar 65, JCS IN 67919.

26. (TS-GP 3) Memo, J-3 to JCS, 18 Mar 65; (TS-GP 3) CSAFM-J-84-65, 19 Mar 65; JCS 2343/543. JMF 9155.3 (18 Mar 65).

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On 19 March, after considerable discussion, the Chief of Staff, Air Force, withdrew his objection to deployment of the Army division to the Pleiku area, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to add the wording that he desired with regard to increasing air attacks on NVN and the deployment of the four squadrons. The resultant memorandum was approved and sent to the Secretary of Defense on 20 March.²⁷

The Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary of Defense that they now considered that US combat forces must be introduced in a combat role in RVN in sufficient strength to achieve "an effective margin of combat power" and to let the enemy know that the United States intended to stand by the GVN. Participation by ROK and other third country forces, if offered, would be valuable both psychologically and as actual combat assistance.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff then recommended the following deployments and actions:

a. Expand mission of Marine elements at Da Nang to include counterinsurgency combat operations. Deploy remainder of the III Marine Expeditionary Force to the Da Nang area as requested by CINCPAC, with the same missions.

b. Deploy, as soon as proper logistic support is insured, a US Army division with necessary supporting forces from the continental United States for employment in the central plateau, centered on the Pleiku area, for counterinsurgency combat operations.

c. Deploy, as soon as practicable, a Republic of Korea Army division force to South Vietnam for counterinsurgency and base security operations.

d. Deploy, as requested by CINCPAC, four of the nine Air Force squadrons

General Wheeler immediately notified CINCPAC of the recommendations that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had made to Secretary McNamara. He asked him to give, as soon as possible, his views on the logistic requirements and command arrangements necessary to carry out the JCS recommendations.²⁸

27. (S) Dec On JCS 2343/543, 19 Mar 65; (S-GP 3) JCSM-204-65 to SecDef, 20 Mar 65; JMF 9155.3 (18 Mar 65).

28. (S) Msg, JCS 1008-65 to CINCPAC, 20 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

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Admiral Sharp sent General Wheeler's message to General Westmoreland seeking his views and suggesting that he consider deploying the Army division to Qui Nhon initially to establish a logistic base, insure the security of the area, and carry out aggressive patrolling. After the base was established, the Korean division would take over from the US division, which would then move to the central plateau. He made other suggestions for possible employment of the ROK division in an enclave and asked for suggestions on command relationships between the ROK, the US Marines, and the RVN. COMUSMACV would have operational control of the Marines.²⁹

In his reply General Westmoreland recommended that the III MEF be stationed in the Da Nang area and the Army division in the Qui Nhon-Pleiku area. The ROK division might best be used to provide security for airfield construction at Chu Lai. These deployments would also allow the opening of the rail line and of Highway One from Qui Nhon to Hue. Insofar as command arrangements were concerned, he and the commander of the RVNAF should act together on a "coordinate/cooperative" basis with each retaining command of his national forces. A small combined US/GVN staff would be maintained at the highest level in the field to mutually approve or disapprove staff actions. For this staff, which would have limited directive powers, General Westmoreland suggested a US Chief with a full-time RVN deputy.

Below this level the command relations and control arrangements would be played by ear with US and RVN units in the same area operating along lines agreed to by the intermediate unit or headquarters commanders. Close liaison would be maintained between these intermediate headquarters, with all directives passing through national channels. Because of the language problem, among others, the ROK units would be under US operational control--for all practical purposes under US command. These ROK forces initially would only be assigned area security missions. General Westmoreland foresaw attaching the ROK division to the MEF, with the Assistant MEF Division Commander being physically with the ROK Division commander in his headquarters. The concept thus presented was, General Westmoreland stated, only an interim arrangement and was susceptible to modification "if and when it becomes politically palatable or militarily essential" to have the United States take full command. He believed that he would have "de facto" control of RVNAF forces in any bilateral operations anyway.³⁰

29. (48) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 210053Z, Mar 65.

30. (48) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 1566 to CINCPAC, 22 Mar 65.

(See Ch. 22, Command Arrangements).

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Ambassador Taylor went into greater detail on his ideas for employing US forces on 27 March when he informed the Secretary of State that it was quite clear that the existing operational units of the RVNAF were incapable of coping with the VC threat. The United States must decide what kind of strategy it would pursue during 1965, whether to base that strategy on the hope that ROLLING THUNDER would take care of the situation, whether to concentrate on reversing the downward trend in certain critical provinces, or whether to go all-out by injection of all possible military strength into RVN or, as he phrased it, "to go for broke to win rapidly." He then discussed the ideas which he had first presented earlier in March for the use of US forces, citing again the advantages of each. He also examined the matter of combining some of these ideas such as the use of mobile reserves operating out of offensive enclaves. He said that if the United States decided that additional ground forces were needed he would favor their employment "in accordance with the Offensive Enclave-Mobile Reaction" idea.³¹

Reporting to the Chairman, the Director, on 31 March, stated that additional approvals for deployment of US forces had reached a total of 32,686 in the RVN. Additional requests for authorizations totalling 3,882 were pending approval by the Secretary of Defense. This augmentation was independent of the combat forces that were currently being considered. The additional authorizations that would be required to attain a combat posture in the RVN amounted to 77,814 which, if approved, would bring the total authorization for US forces in the RVN to 116,341.³²

At a meeting of the Secretary of Defense, Ambassador Taylor, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington on 29 March 1965, General Wheeler summarized the JCS views on how best to employ US and other "third country" forces. The Marine force at Da Nang should be built up to full MEF strength and its mission expanded to include active counterinsurgency. An Army division should be sent into the plateau area as soon as "logistically appropriate" and given a pacification mission. Other suggested deployments included a ROK division and 4 more.

31. (TS) Msg, Saigon 3120 to State, 27 Mar 65.

32. (TS) DJSM-395-65 to CJCS, 31 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

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tactical fighter squadrons to be sent into the battle area as space and logistic support became available. General Wheeler noted that the Joint Chiefs of Staff appreciated that the facts of "political and logistic" life would dictate the time phasing of this buildup.³³

Ambassador Taylor again noted that rapid introduction of a force of this size would create a variety of political problems. He suggested that the size of the force be left open, but that planning proceed on the basis of an orderly buildup as political and logistic problems were resolved. The Secretary of Defense asserted that the MEB at Da Nang should be filled out to include support elements, thus making it self-sufficient. He believed that more US Army forces, probably somewhere between a brigade and a division, would be needed to relieve the ARVN for offensive pacification missions. He was not sure how or where third country forces should be employed or at what rate they should be introduced. He felt however that they should be introduced as rapidly as possible commensurate with political acceptability, logistic support, and useful missions for these forces.³⁴

Ambassador Taylor then reviewed his ideas on employment of US combat forces, describing these under the general headings of "The Defensive Enclave," and "The Offensive Reserve - Strike Mission." He advocated establishing several enclaves along the coast and assigning them a combination offensive-counterinsurgency/strike role. To offset the requirement for more US forces in the RVN he favored keeping ready reserve forces afloat off RVN and on Okinawa for quick air reinforcement, if needed. General Johnson disagreed with employing US forces under the Offensive Reserve-Strike Mission initially, because of the proven lack of combat intelligence. He advocated instead setting up model territorial pacification operations in the three plateau provinces. Secretary McNamara expressed the view that planning should initially be accomplished for a number of offensive enclaves along the coast. As experience grew and logistic support was developed, the mission of US forces could be expanded and the setting up of plateau enclaves could be considered.³⁵

33. (TS) Note to Control Div, "The Meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense with Ambassador Taylor (U)", 29 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

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Chapter 20

LOGISTIC REQUIREMENTS - SHIFT TO A WAR FOOTING

United States deployment planning in the first months of 1965 was influenced decisively by the lack of an adequate logistic base and the sorry state of facilities and arrangements to support US forces in the RVN logistically. The JCS had recognized very early that the existing system for logistic support, minimal even for the advisory effort, would have to be revamped and strengthened before combat troops could be deployed, even under the fairly limited concepts first considered. To do otherwise would have been imprudent at the least. At a longer range, the entire structure of logistic support in Southeast Asia would require great improvement before US contingency plans to meet a wider threat in that area would have any real chance to succeed. In late 1964 and early 1965, however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff addressed themselves primarily to the narrower problem of providing, in advance, a system that would allow adequate support for additional men and units and, hopefully, would provide a base for further expansion.

Westmoreland's Assessment

The defects in the US logistic system within the RVN had been identified and catalogued by General Westmoreland in a detailed study sent to the Joint Chiefs of Staff just a month before the important Washington meetings of November-December 1964. Reflecting the nature of its origins, the overall US logistic system, originally oriented in support of the RVNAF and gradually shaped by expediency and the semi-autonomous nature of US agencies in the RVN, was actually fragmented into 15 different, discrete, not particularly complementary systems, four of them quasi-military (CIA, USOM, CARE, and the Deputy Officer in Charge of Construction (DOICC)) and the remaining ten military (three RVNAF, seven US). Despite the several US military subsystems, the focal point of support was in the Saigon area with the result that advisors and units "up-country" often suffered from lack of adequate support. Nor was there any real common-user basis to the systems. Two subordinate commands under COMUSMACV were charged primarily with logistic support of forces. These were the US Army Support Command (USASCV), responsible for combat support to

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the RVNAF; and the Headquarters Support Activity, Saigon (HSAS), charged with logistic support of the US forces in the RVN.¹

On 30 October, General Westmoreland cited for CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff the principal "immediate shortcomings" of the US common-user system in RVN. These were 1) inadequate supervision of the handling of US cargoes at the up-country minor ports; 2) inadequate coordination of logistic functions among multiple MACV commands; 3) inefficiency stemming from a system that operated entirely on a retail basis from Saigon without having any up-country field depots; 4) incomplete support of US forces by HSAS in the common-user supply and services categories. He carefully described each of these deficiencies and its effect upon his command, saying that they should be remedied as soon as possible. In his recommendations for improvement of the system, COMUSMACV called for: 1) expansion of existing systems in volume to accommodate the increased strengths of US forces in RVN; 2) establishment of an integrated up-country retail common-user logistic system; 3) expansion of the base wholesale common-user logistic system into additional supply categories and into services not provided by HSAS; 4) integration of up-country retail and base wholesale common-user logistic systems; 5) elimination of duplication between HSAS and HQ Commandant, MACV, and other minor duplications of support functions; 6) "displacement" of HSAS with a US Army logistic command.

While General Westmoreland seemed, in these terse recommendations, to be calling mainly for a reorganization and revamping of the system in terms of responsibilities and functions and for several thousand trained specialists to man the system and make it work, there were far broader connotations involved. Any significant expansion of US strength in RVN would obviously require millions of dollars worth of construction for cantonments, depots, storage areas, and bases, for air fields and roads, and for improvement of ports and harbors. Stock levels of all types of essential supplies would have to be increased, maintenance and control facilities established, and distribution systems made ready. Major items of equipment would be needed and communications systems would require major improvements to support anything greater than a small addition of advisory personnel.

1. (S-GP 3) MACV Staff Study, "Improvement of US Logistics Systems in RVN," 26 Oct 64, JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 1.

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The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed in principle with General Westmoreland's assessment and limited recommendations and took such actions as were possible in the next several months to support them. Beyond this, as the urgency of the situation in RVN rose early in 1965, they made other recommendations and took other actions to build up the logistic base for support of increased US involvement in RVN within the context of the broader question posed by the communist threat to all of Southeast Asia.

Additional Logistic Units and Personnel

The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not consider it "militarily prudent" to await a contingency before reorganizing the existing logistic support structure in the RVN. They began at once the necessary actions, directing CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to coordinate on a more detailed plan for reorganization, defining the requirement for the Army Logistic Command, and taking into account President Johnson's great interest in third country forces, support of which would be an additional requirement. On 23 December CINCPAC forwarded to the JCS a COMUSMACV plan, which he considered sound and realistic. In addition to asking for an Army Logistic Command of about 2,100 men, General Westmoreland in this plan also called for an Army Engineer Construction Group of 2,400, primarily for construction of camps and bases. The MACV J-4 visited Washington on 28 December to brief the Joint Staff on the plan.²

On 15 January the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he approve, in principle, the introduction of both the Army Logistic Command (Log Command) and the Engineer Construction Group, the former to provide a logistic structure capable of expansion of common-user support, the latter to "alleviate a shortfall" in US construction resources in RVN. They pointed out to the Secretary that by sending the Log Command to RVN, the United States would be preparing for "future adjustments in US strength and changes in method or tempo of operations." The Construction Group would augment the "saturated indigenous contract construction capability" and could operate under hazardous conditions at which civilian contractors would probably balk. They asked

2. (S-GP 4) Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS 23 Dec 64. (23-GP 4) J-4 TP 12-64, 29 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64), sec 2.

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for immediate action to send an advance echelon of about 230 men of the Log Command to RVN, with the main body and the Construction Group to follow on a schedule than being determined through detailed studies.³

The Deputy Secretary of Defense informed the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 26 January that he was not clear on the real logistic capabilities in RVN and on just what needed to be done. On the next day, in a memorandum to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mr. Vance said that, even if the 4,500-man increase to support the Log Command and the Construction Group were granted, it would not eliminate any of the 15 separate systems, it would merely superimpose another. He desired simplification and increased effectiveness of the logistic arrangements in the RVN, but in order to pin down precisely the logistic problems, he intended to send Mr. Glenn Gibson, Deputy ASD (I&L), to RVN to talk with General Westmoreland's logisticians. He asked that the J-4, LTG Richard D. Meyer, accompany Gibson. The Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff agreed. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, observed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the same day that the United States was getting itself into a difficult logistics situation in the RVN.⁴

Mr. Gibson and General Meyer interviewed every major commander in RVN, as well as CINCPAC and his component commanders and Ambassador Taylor. The report which they made to the Deputy Secretary of Defense on their return on 5 February confirmed that logistic deficiencies in "several functional areas," even for support of forces already in the RVN, were serious and that any significant deployment would so strain the logistics base that operational effectiveness of combat units could be "degraded." In the belief, however, that any corrective measures must be in consonance with contingency plans and should "facilitate rather than impede possible future accelerated and augmented U.S. operations in Vietnam," they made recommendations that were, in retrospect, on the cautious side and that did not lead to any swift amelioration of deficiencies.

3. (S-GP 4) JCSM-33-65 to SecDef, 15 Jan 65 (derived from JCS 2343/486-4), JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 3.

4. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 27 Jan 65, Att to JCS 2343/486-5, JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 3.

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Recognizing the defects in the system, the survey team's report to Mr. Vance agreed that the US Army was best prepared to coordinate and manage common supply and that an Army Logistic Command was the best vehicle for achieving this. Nevertheless the survey team recommended to Mr. Vance that he authorize, for the present, only a small advance party of the Log Command, building it up when appropriate by transferring persons already in RVN performing "housekeeping" functions. They did not believe that facilities were available for the deployment of the Construction Group or for the majority of the Log Command units, nor were funds available to construct such facilities. They recommended against sending the Construction Group, since the commercial contractor construction capability could "possibly" be expanded to take care of all necessary construction. This was in keeping with the tone of much of the survey team's report, which called for use of indigenous civilian and US civilian contract workers in lieu of US military wherever possible. On 12 February Mr. Vance disapproved introduction of the Engineer Group. He approved, in principle, the introduction of the Log Command but authorized early deployment of only 75 men and officers. He directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to complete promptly additional studies of the COMUSMACV Plan and to recommend to the Secretary of Defense actions to bring about the swiftest possible improvement in logistic posture while keeping down deployments. He appointed the Assistant Secretary of Defense (I&L) as the focal point for all necessary actions of the Office of the Secretary of Defense to simplify procedures, remove unnecessary administrative "constraints," and recommend staffing requirements for logistic support functions in the RVN.⁵

On 19 March further augmentation of the Log Command by 543 men and officers was recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. A few days later, on 27 March, as decision on further deployments and the possible use of US forces in direct combat appeared imminent, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked that the full complement of the 2,100-man Log Command be authorized as soon as possible and that the Secretary reconsider his decision with respect to the Construction Group.⁶

5. (S-GP 3) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 12 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/486-8; JCS 2343/486-11, 25 Feb 65; JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 4.

6. (S-GP 4) JCSM-196-65 to SecDef, 19 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/486-12); (S-GP 4) JCSM-219-65 to SecDef, 27 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/486-14); (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 2 Apr 65, Att to JCS 2343/486-16; JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 5.

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On the same day, in a personal message to General Wheeler, Admiral Sharp called for a US logistic force of between 18-20,000 personnel in RVN to support one Army division, the remainder of the III MEF, the ROK division, and additional air forces in RVN and Thailand. These men were in addition to logistic forces already in RVN but included the Log Command and the Construction Group. On 2 April in connection with other decisions on deployment and employment of forces, the President approved the deployment recommended by CINCPAC. The full Army Log Command and the Engineer Construction Group were approved for deployment as part of this package. (See Ch. 21.)⁷

The Meyer Report

In a separate report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Meyer on 5 February had explained, in greater detail than had the survey report rendered by him and Mr. Gibson, the state of logistic affairs in RVN, with particular emphasis on the specific deficiencies and requirements. The problems which he identified were not capable of quick or easy solution in most instances, and US officials would be compelled to take drastic and expensive measures over an extended period in order to alleviate these problems. The evidence indicates, however, that General Meyer's report was instrumental in bringing about action to improve the RVN logistic base earlier than might otherwise have been the case.

Real Estate and Construction

According to General Meyer, the greatest single factor affecting force deployment and logistic support in RVN was the shortage of real estate and facilities. There were at least nine different channels through which facilities might be programmed, funded, and constructed. But long lead times involved in securing approvals of funding, design, and materials, and in site selection, had resulted in unusually long delays. In February 1965, approved and funded programs for construction in RVN approximated \$46 million. Various other proposals for construction awaiting funding and approval could reach at least \$140 million. General Meyer noted that Raymond-Morrison-Knudsen (RMK), the civilian contractor for US construction in

7. (S-GP 1) J-4 TP 3-65 for CICS, 4 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3
(5 Apr 65) sec 1.

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RVN, could probably expand its capability far beyond the currently projected workload.⁸

General Meyer charged that lack of coordination between various US components in RVN and the tendency to "go it alone" without coordinating through MACV, had resulted in competition for real estate and delays in needed construction. There was an immediate need for a technical staff within MACV capable of 1) making a master plan for all installation development in the RVN, 2) coordinating facility sitings and real estate acquisitions, 3) coordinating and approving all component construction programs, and 4) establishing priorities for all facilities designed and constructed by the Deputy Officer in Charge of Construction (DOICC).⁹

General Meyer also stated that planning for programs in RVN by all Services and the MAP had, until recently, been on the assumption that US forces would be withdrawn by June 1965. This had resulted in constant adjustment, ad hoc solutions, and expensive crash actions, particularly with regard to construction. General Meyer told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that an integrated construction program should now be developed to support currently known requirements, using all available sources of funds. Additional reprogramming of current approved programs should take place as necessary.

"Long-range logistic planning should not be confused with short-range political actions and reactions, or on long-range military political objectives," he cautioned. "While the latter might well be to finish the job as soon as possible, long lead time actions (construction and other logistic programs) should be developed over at least a three year period."¹⁰

In-Country Military Reorganization

Supply and logistic problems were compounded in the RVN, in General Meyer's view, by the unconventional structure of the US military management organization. He pointed out that MACV's management structure was unique, thus complicating

8. (S-GP 4) Rpt, Dir of Log to JCS, 5 Oct 65, Att to JCS 2343/486-11, JMF 9155.3 (10 Nov 64) sec 4. Hereafter cited as "Meyer Rpt."

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

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logistic and supply procedures. The amalgamation of MACV and the MAAG in 1964 had created, in effect, a fifth Service operating without backup structure and with ad hoc procedures. The 2d Air Division, which operated as a conventional component command structure, had the least administrative difficulty. The US Army Support Command, Vietnam (USASCV), was about 80 percent an Army component, having an overextended span of control, yet lacking the full capability of the 2d Air Division. The US Marine Corps and the US Navy units were essentially self-sufficient and small in numbers. Probably for this reason, they were without any major logistic problems. The advisors were in "no-man's land" and had no support authorized through Service channels.¹¹

General Meyer proposed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff request CINCPAC to prepare a plan to remedy these structural peculiarities by: 1) making MACV a true area unified commander under CINCPAC; 2) confirming the 2d Air Division commander as an Air Force component commander in RVN; 3) redesignating USASCV as US Army, Vietnam, and giving it the same status and capability as 2d Air Division; 4) keeping the desirable features of Service command channels and backup support through the 13th Air Force in the Philippines and the US Army, Ryukyu Islands, on Okinawa; 5) giving the commander of the HSAS the additional duty of Commander NAV Forces Ashore, Vietnam; 6) as soon as practicable and on a corps area or other appropriate geographical basis, phase the responsibility for funding of logistic support of the MACV advisors to their own Service components. In some cases Navy advisors in predominantly Army areas could be shifted locally to Army support, but the Navy Commander ashore would have the responsibility to assure their support.

As follow-on actions, General Meyer proposed that the logistic responsibilities of the HQ Commandant, MACV, be phased out and that fiscal and funding procedures be established to relieve field commanders of working with the current inter-Service support agreements, which were cumbersome.

Coordinated Logistics Planning

General Meyer suggested that there was a real need for long-range logistic planning within the US structure in RVN.

¹¹. Ibid.

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The increase in US effort, the mutual dependence of the US and GVN elements, and the impact of "possible changes in direction" created a need for formal integration of logistic planning at the top level. Although there was much opportunity for mutual support and many logistics-type subpanels in RVN, military logistic problems tended to be solved either unilaterally or functionally. Many US quasi-governmental military or US civilian executive departments were involved. General Meyer pointed out that there was a requirement for a logistic planning and advisory council of the US Mission Council, with membership from the Embassy, USOM, CAS, MACV, 2d Air Division, USASCV, and HSAS at a minimum. This council would establish joint and combined long-range logistics objectives, standards, and policies affecting all US interests. It would determine mutual support, available or required, from individual plans and programs. It would exploit civil assistance (AID) programs to assist military logistic effort where mutually beneficial and would relate changes in military plans and strengths to logistic effort and "constraints."¹²

The Military Logistics Council

In proposing a top-level logistics council in RVN, General Meyer was calling on his own experience as a member of the Military Logistics Council (MLC) that had been established as an informal, but effective, coordination body by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in April 1963. The membership of this important body comprised the J-4, the Special Assistant for Strategic Mobility, Joint Staff (SASM), the Director, DSA, and the logistics chiefs of each of the Services. This MLC was an informal, but influential, body which served as a forum for discussion of logistic matters and problems of mutual interest. While not empowered to take actions in its own right, the very composition of the body, encompassing, as it did, the widest range of military logistics knowledge within the Department of Defense and composed of men in key positions, gave it an influence in logistics matters that enabled it to identify and solve many of the logistics problems, large and small, that developed in connection with the war in RVN. The MLC met regularly to consider these problems

¹². Ibid.

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and was instrumental in expediting solutions through Service channels or through joint action.¹³

In February, as a result of a Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, proposal to the Service Chiefs, the MLC was designated the central point of contact between the Joint Staff and the Service Staffs in logistics matters associated with the improvement of US readiness to support a higher level of actions in Southeast Asia. The MLC would provide the medium for transmission of information and for informal coordination of the Service logistic positions. The MLC would, in cases of disagreement, submit logistics problems to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for resolution.¹⁴

Maintenance

General Meyer noted that the US capability for maintenance of noninstalled equipment was practically nonexistent outside the Saigon area. In Saigon the US Army had a very small detachment of maintenance technicians augmented by local nationals, but up-country maintenance, for other than organized units, was limited to first echelon. The problem was particularly serious in maintaining such important items as portable generators, the only source of electric power in remote areas. General Meyer proposed that a field maintenance capability for Army vehicles, weapons, and signal equipment be established at Da Nang and that maintenance detachments be set up at existing US bases at Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, Can Tho, and at each of the US aviation battalion locations. Roving maintenance teams would service other small units. At a longer range other field maintenance activities would have to be established when facilities were available to accommodate them. Better use of inter-Service maintenance arrangements for common items was also indicated.¹⁵

13. (U) Interv, Willard J. Webb with CAPT C.E. Smith, USN, Chief, Plans Division, J-4, 16 Jan 69.

14 (TS-GP 4) JCS 2339/174-2, 7 Mar 65, JMF 9155 (19 Feb 65) sec 3.

15. (S-GP 4) Meyer Rpt.

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Ammunition Handling and Storage

In view of the possibility of commitment of US combat forces, it was essential to establish an ammunition supply system to provide for the orderly receipt, storage, and issue of ammunition. Input had exceeded the handling and depot capacities both in-country and at enroute staging bases, resulting in violations of safety rules and regulations. General Meyer stated that a safety surveillance capacity was lacking even though urgently required. Long lead time projects were underway to provide additional ammunition handling and storage facilities. Other possibilities such as "floating storage" and better delivery schedules were being looked into. Projects underway to position additional lighter-age capability in RVN would improve the ability to handle ammunition at in-country ports. The J-4 recommended that US Army and USAF supervisory personnel be placed at each major ammunition dump to supervise the labor force, to maintain records, and to establish surveillance and safety measures. In the meantime, US ammunition should be stored at GVN ammo storage points as much as possible.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff made General Meyer's report available to the Joint Staff for their information in connection with the continuing efforts to coordinate the closely related requirements for improvement of the RVN logistics base and for the other readiness measures involved in the deployments projected for SVN.

General Meyer's observations on the logistic weaknesses were reinforced by the Chief of Staff, Army, upon his return from the RVN in mid-March. As had General Meyer, General Johnson noted the seriousness of the construction problem. Among his recommendations which the President approved, he suggested that MACV be provided with "quick release" authority and funds for construction projects in RVN to permit meeting tight deadlines and to reduce the scope of activities which would otherwise require extensive military construction effort. He suggested that a MACV-controlled stockpile of construction materials and equipment be established within three or four days' sailing time of RVN to assure the timely availability of essential supplies and equipment. At the same time General Johnson noted the great need to reorient the supply flow in the RVN from north-south to east-west in order to shorten the delivery times and to decrease reliance on Saigon. He also recommended beginning dredging operations

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at the harbors of Da Nang, Qui Nhon, and Nha Trang so that ocean-going ships could berth at those up-country ports to land supplies.¹⁶

Support of Contingency Plans

All of the requirements for improving the logistics base in the RVN lay within the broader scope of the requirements for supporting US military operations contemplated, under CINCPAC OPLANS 32-64 and 39-65, to meet any concerted communist attack on Southeast Asia. Virtually no actions were contemplated or taken in RVN which did not contribute to the strengthening of the overall US position to carry out those broader contingency plans. In late February, at the direction of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (I&L), the Joint Staff, the Services, and the DSA made an analysis of the ability of the United States to carry out these contingency plans as of 20 February 1965. Logistics factors were included as a major consideration of this analysis. With specific regard to RVN the following broad requirements were noted: 1) improvements to rail and road nets in RVN; 2) improvements to secondary ports and provision of lighterage capability; 3) construction and/or improvement of airfields at Bien Hoa, Da Nang, Chu Lai, Tam Ky, Tan Son Nhut, Pleiku; and 4) construction of a hospital facility at Saigon.¹⁷

Construction of Airfields in RVN

CINCPAC had stated to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in late 1964 that if the United States intended to remain in Southeast Asia, a stronger and more responsive system of airfields would have to be developed. He had recommended that a jet-capable airfield be constructed at Chu Lai at an estimated cost of \$6.5 million and that a second jet-capable runway be constructed at Da Nang parallel to and similar to the existing runway at a cost of about \$3.5 million. On 11 November 1964 the Joint Chiefs of Staff had informed the Secretary of

16. (TS-GP 1) Memo, CSA to SecDef et al., 14 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65.

17. (TS-GP 4) JCS 2339/174-2, 7 Mar 65, JMF 9155 (19 Feb 65) sec 3.

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Defense that because of the contemplated increase in deployments and the need to enhance the logistic support capability and to cope "more flexibly with a wide range of future exigencies," these projects at Chu Lai and Da Nang should be approved. They also recommended that funds be made available for architectural and engineering studies in connection with these projects.¹⁸

Secretary McNamara generally agreed with the need for improved base support in Southeast Asia, and he approved interim funding for the architect-engineer studies required prior to expansion of the Da Nang airfield and the new field at Chu Lai. He deferred a decision on actual construction, however, to await the outcome of these studies and to evaluate the need for these facilities "in light of the current situation."¹⁹

With the development early in 1965 of new courses of action to meet the growing enemy threat, it became more and more obvious that more facilities would be required. The United States had increased the number of personnel and aircraft in RVN and had thus created a very high density of aircraft of all Services at the three major airfields in RVN. The situation prompted CINCPAC to provide the Joint Chiefs of Staff with a timetable indicating that the design work for the Chu Lai airfield could be completed by 1 August 1965. If the funds required were made available in April, by June the design work would be sufficiently advanced so that actual construction could begin. Both projects could be completed by June 1966. The Joint Chiefs of Staff immediately passed this information on to Secretary McNamara, stating that "The changing military situation and fluid political environment in Southeast Asia underscore the importance of contingency preparations." They pointed out that Da Nang, Tan Son Nhut, and Bien Hoa air bases, the only jet-capable airfields in RVN, had approached the point of saturation. There were five airfields in Thailand but these were subject to some limitations, including longer flying time to targets and restrictions imposed by the Government of Thailand.²⁰

18. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-950-64 to SecDef, 11 Nov 64, JMF 9155.3 (26 Sep 64).

19. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Airfield Support of Contingency Plans for Southeast Asia (A)," 23 Dec 64, same file.

20. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-144-65 to SecDef, 4 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/483-2), JMF 9155.3 (26 Sep 64).

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The Da Nang/Chu Lai area had major military advantages which should, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed, be exploited. These were the fact that the area could be supported by sea over the beach, it was ideally located for strikes against NVN or South China, and it was directly accessible from the US bases at Okinawa and in the Philippines. In view of the "constant increase of communist activity in Southeast Asia, the need to prepare for a wide variety of courses of action which includes sizeable air operations, the high density of aircraft of all Services and RVNAF and low dispersal capability," the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the Secretary of Defense reconsider his deferral of the projects at Chu Lai and Da Nang. They further recommended that the projects be funded under a special contingency authorization or other authorization, such as MAP or AID, and not out of a Service budget.²¹

Secretary McNamara approved the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendation that the new airfield be built at Chu Lai and the additional runway and connecting taxiways be built at Da Nang. He ordered construction begun as soon as possible. He stated, however, that because the projects had been "Navy sponsored" from the start, owing to the predominant Marine usage under CINCPAC OPLANs, the Department of the Navy would be the sponsoring Service and would furnish funds from its military construction program.²²

Laying the Ground Work for an Expanded War

Closely allied to the construction and other requirements for logistic readiness were important measures that would have to be taken to lay the ground work for an expanded war in RVN. It was possible that a much greater US involvement, up to and including a full-scale war, would result from enemy reaction to US actions in Vietnam. Thus far, US military, economic, and political programs in Southeast Asia had been geared to a situation in which US forces were not directly involved in combat. On 16 March, after talking with the Chief of Staff, Army, General Wheeler told the Director, Joint Staff, that there was a need for early action to shift US governmental procedures

²¹. Ibid.

²². (S-GP 3). Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Additional Airfield Support for Southeast Asia," 18 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (26 Sep 64).

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and operations to a footing more suitable for the prosecution of the war. Substantial adjustments would have to be made in military programs, and changes in programming methods and program execution might be needed. He instructed the Director, Joint Staff, to direct the Joint Staff to prepare quickly specific recommendations for adjustments that could be made within the authority of the Secretary of Defense and the President and for adjustments requiring legislation, funding, military personnel, direction and control of US military operations in Vietnam, and any other authorizations required, including standby authority.²³

The Joint Chiefs of Staff called at once on the field commanders to describe those problems that had developed within their areas of responsibility as a result of trying to carry on wartime operations using procedures geared to a peacetime situation. Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland replied promptly, and their views were used extensively by the Joint Staff in the preparation of its study.²⁴

As a result of this study on 2 April 1965 the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense which set forth in detail the various problems that existed in bringing support of RVN operations up to a wartime footing.

"The effectiveness of US military actions in the measure and scope now required to prosecute the war in Vietnam will be enhanced by the adjustment of those present peacetime US policies and procedures which have been the basis for our support of the RVN," they told Secretary McNamara. "We are in war in which a loss would be viewed world-wide as a US defeat. We must not permit this to happen. Consequently, it is considered prudent that immediate steps be taken to remove all administrative and procedural impediments that hamper us in the prosecution of this war."

They informed the Secretary that "substantial adjustments" in present policies and procedures were required, and

23. (GP-GP 3) CM-488-65 to DJS, 16 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Mar 65).

24. (GP) JCS 2343/540-1, 24 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Mar 65).

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in a series of appendices to their memorandum recapitulated for him these necessary adjustments.²⁵

Funding the War

With respect to funding the war, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reminded the Secretary that money to support operations in Southeast Asia came through several funding channels and was restricted as to its use and controlled by various administrative procedures. The FY 1965 MAP and related fiscal support had been developed for a noncombat military situation. The combat operations now taking place were being supported by the individual Services, which had to reprogram their respective peacetime budgets and the Military Assistance Program (MAP) in order to provide this support. Each Service, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted, thus had to expend considerable administrative effort and cut back on its other priority programs. The Army, for example, could not build up reserve supplies and, indeed, could barely maintain its existing levels. Added to the diversion of operating funds for supporting combat activities, combat losses were causing attrition of equipment and supplies at a rate far exceeding the planned peacetime rate. To accomplish even the limited reprogramming of funds within their authority, the Services had to cut back previously prepared programs in order to meet the more urgent needs of Southeast Asia on a stopgap basis.²⁶

Under normal procedures, military construction for Southeast Asia required about two years from the first determination of a requirement until construction of a facility was approved. Even though Congress had granted authority to approve and program emergency construction projects, this authority was limited to approximately \$41 million during the remainder of FY 65. Current construction requirements were in excess of this amount.

In their memorandum of 2 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that these conditions could not be continued during "war type" actions. The present system entailed delay, and denied flexibility to commanders.

25. (TS) JCSM-238-65 to SecDef, 2 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Mar 65).

26. (TS) App A to JCSM-238-65 to SecDef, 2 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Mar 65).

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Further, the system required that details be forwarded through several echelons of command to the national level for decision. "Limitations and restrictions which hinder the prosecution of the war must be removed," the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary.²⁷

The Secretary of Defense already possessed, however, certain authorities that he could use in emergencies. For example, Congress had granted him authority to transfer up to \$200 million between appropriations. He could also provide funds on a deficiency basis to pay for an increase in military personnel beyond those provided in annual appropriations if the President decided to support the increase. Further, the President could suspend the apportionment process which apportioned funds on a time-phased basis. He could also direct the Secretary of Defense to submit supplemental appropriation requests to Congress. Finally, deficiencies could be incurred as required for necessities for any current fiscal year without dollar limit for fuel, subsistence, transportation, clothing, and medical supplies for US forces beyond the amount of appropriations available.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff specified for Secretary McNamara those actions which he could take without delay to augment Service accounts.²⁸

The MAP

The MAP had undergone major reprogramming because of the threat in Southeast Asia. Normally military assistance was supplied on a peacetime basis, but some exceptions had been made in the case of Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed Secretary McNamara that MAP administrative and legal procedures were cumbersome. The MAP was a cyclic system involving long lead time for planning and implementation. Moreover, it had a highly centralized management which was not susceptible to rapid changes in requirements. In RVN, Laos, and Thailand requirements for money and materiel were changing rapidly, not only in kind but in magnitude. Approved levels for materiel planning, programming, and management in RVN were exceeded by immediate demands, yet the complicated,

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

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relatively unresponsive system remained unchanged. A change in the system which would free it of its close fiscal control and administrative overhead requirements and which would reduce lead times and make it more flexible was definitely indicated, particularly in RVN but also in Thailand and Laos.

The MAP system for supply and funding required programming major end items on a line-item basis. Each line item was funded separately. This assisted in expediting supply but caused burdensome procedures for the Services, the unified commands, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

MAP deviation procedures were very complicated since they were designed to maintain an "audit trail" of obligation and expenditure of funds as well as "what happened and why" when program requirements changed. All changes to the RVN program were eventually recorded in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Both Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland considered these deviation procedures an undesirable administrative burden.

The Services could not respond readily to wartime MAP demands because, with few exceptions, they had not been authorized to procure and stock materiel in anticipation of MAP requirements. This had caused losses from Service stocks or extraordinary procurement actions. Adding to the cumbersome nature of the MAP was a restriction imposed by the Foreign Assistance Act that prevented any grant-aid MAP item costing more than \$100,000 from being furnished to any country unless the Chief of the MAAG certified in writing within six months to 30 days prior to delivery that the country had the capability to use the item effectively.

Since the war in RVN had become a major factor in US funding policy, the United States had reprogrammed within the world-wide MAP to support the war. The Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that the FY 1965 MAP, for example, had not been adequate to fund requirements for Vietnam without a serious impact on the programs of other countries. The FY 1965 program for Vietnam had grown from an original \$205.8 million established in July 1964 to \$278.8 million by 16 February 1965. CINCPAC estimated that actual FY 1965 requirements for Vietnam as of 2 April 1965 stood at \$327.5 million. Requirements for MAP programs in other countries such as Korea, China, Greece, and Turkey had lessened somewhat but these countries were important to the collective defense arrangements of the United States and any cuts in their already reduced programs

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could have serious political repercussions. Such cuts might also create uncertainty in the minds of other US allies as to US sincerity and true intentions.

Several steps had been taken in the past to simplify the MAP system. Authority had been delegated to unified commands and the military departments to make changes to the MAP without the Office of the Secretary of Defense approval for high-volume, low-value transactions without policy significance. Also, the changes in line-item records were made by the military departments after implementation. Another technique, the "shopping list," had been employed infrequently to obtain early high-level decision to provide some unprogrammed items which were, in effect, unforeseen requirements. These expedients did not alter the basic MAP system, which required a high level of detailed planning and centralized management. The Military Construction Program (MCP) under the MAP was more inflexible than other MAP procedures because of stringent legislative barriers which imposed peacetime restrictions on military construction appropriations that unduly lengthened lead time for approval and funding of vital construction projects in RVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he immediately increase the availability of funds for both the MAP and Service programs to support Southeast Asia actions through use of his appropriation transfer authority. They also recommended that he develop supplemental appropriation requests for submission to Congress at an early date.²⁹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that the situation in RVN, Thailand, and Laos was beyond the scope of the MAP as presently set up. The MAP system required a level of detailed planning and centralized management warranted only under peacetime conditions. This system, said the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with its requirement for close fiscal control and resultant delays, denied responsible commanders the flexibility needed in a wartime situation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that "MAP procedures for the RVN, Thailand, and Laos, and all other MAP supported International Military Assistance Forces which may be deployed to Southeast Asia, should be streamlined and separated from the world-wide MAP."³⁰

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

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Communications for Command Control

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed for the Secretary the progress that had been made since the United States had started building up and improving communications/electronics systems for command and control in Southeast Asia in 1961 and 1962. The United States had, for example, built a BACK PORCH tropospheric scatter system, a US tactical operations-intelligence radio network, a Tactical Air Control system, a commercial microwave communications system in northeast Thailand and the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, and had set up a hamlet radio program. SYNCOM satellites were being employed operationally, and a WET WASH submarine cable had been extended into the area. However, further improvements were necessary to meet the growing demands on communications systems. As in the case of military construction the machinery employed within the Defense establishment for approving and arranging communications/electronics projects costing more than \$100,000 was cumbersome and slow. As an example, one project, the "Integrated US Wideband Communications System for Southeast Asia," first called for by CINCPAC in October 1964 and approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 13 November 1964, was still undergoing administrative processing and no implementing directive had yet been issued. Other projects had been called for by CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were currently reviewing them. If these projects were approved, it was essential that some short-cut methods be developed so that they might be implemented much more quickly than normal procedures would allow.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary that the lack of cryptographically secure voice communications equipment was especially serious in Vietnam. The equipment in-country was almost completely occupied and in constant use. Among measures needed to solve this problem were the withdrawal of such equipment from service in other areas, particularly the CONUS, for redistribution in the PACOM area, and provision of additional funds for increasing production of a new generation of voice security equipment and ancillary devices to adapt this equipment to PACOM employment.³¹

Improvement in Transportation Capabilities

The transportation systems within the United States and from the United States to PACOM and Southeast Asia were modern,

³¹. Ibid.

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well organized, and capable of being expanded rapidly. The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary that support of a greatly increased effort in Vietnam would probably require augmentation of the systems both by military reserve and civilian commercial capabilities. This would be complicated by the ceiling established by the Secretary of Defense for FY 1966 on funding of commercial contract airlift. The expansion of the war in Vietnam would require some changes in the DOD Five Year Force Structure and Financial Program so that elements of the active forces scheduled for transfer to the reserves could be kept on active status. These included C-124 and KC97 aircraft and some troopships. The delivery of some new aircraft, particularly the C-141, should be expedited through accelerated production.

The capacity to receive and discharge cargo and personnel at ports and airfields in Vietnam was marginal and prompt action would have to be taken to increase this capacity. To assist in this, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, the engineer and transportation personnel already requested by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 15 January should be accelerated. RVN port facilities were limited for the receipt and discharge of vessels. Discharge in stream and over-the-beach would be necessary. Lighterage craft were on their way to the PACOM from the United States but there were insufficient organized units in the active Army to keep these craft operating without depleting the forces for support of other missions.

Balance of Payments

On 1 October 1964 the Secretary of Defense had, in a memorandum to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, set forth the policy on balance of payments. He had stated at that time "In view of the uncertainties involved in Southeast Asia at this time, it is my intention that balance of payments considerations should not adversely affect the combat effectiveness of our forces directly or imminently engaged in Southeast Asia." Keeping this in mind, the Joint Chiefs of Staff in their memorandum of 2 April recommended that the Secretary adjust the balance of payments goals for contractual services in such a manner as to separate costs of operations in Southeast Asia from the achievement of totals established for other areas. "Balance of payments restrictions," they

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said, "should not limit the expenditure of funds in the RVN or in those areas in direct support of the war in that area."³²

In a detailed annex to their memorandum the Joint Chiefs of Staff made additional specific recommendations on each of the major areas, i.e., funding, personnel, communications, that they had considered pertinent.³³

These recommendations were being made almost simultaneously with Presidential decisions that were to change the course of the war and that cast the United States into the role of a primary participant in the fight against the VC and their sponsor, North Vietnam. The Secretary of Defense had already indicated that he stood ready to support many of the adjustments, all of which had fiscal implications, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were now proposing be made.

In a memorandum dated 1 March 1965, the Secretary of Defense had told the Secretaries of the Services, the Military Chiefs of the Services, and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, that he wanted it clearly understood that there was an unlimited appropriation available for the financing of aid to Vietnam. "Under no circumstances," he said, "is lack of money to stand in the way of aid to that nation." Such assistance would be provided wherever it was needed, either through MAP or through the "application of U.S. forces and their associated equipment."³⁴

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. (S) Memo, SecDef to SecNav et al., 1 Mar 65, Att to JCS 2343/535, JMF 9155.3 (1 Mar 65).

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Chapter 21

PLANNING FOR DEPLOYMENT - MARCH-JUNE 1965

Important decisions had been made and significant actions taken by the President in the first quarter of 1965. In these months he had ordered the bombing of NVN and had removed the restrictions on the use of US planes and pilots in combat against the VC in the RVN. It had become increasingly apparent that, unless there were sudden and drastic improvements in the military situation, the growing national resolve, symbolic in these actions, could logically culminate in sending US ground forces to fight alongside the RVNAF. The planning and recommendations for deployment of US forces that had taken place during March, while predicated on the need for protecting US forces and installations, had strongly reflected such a realization.

When the President, responding to the advice of his military advisors, authorized in early April the commitment of US ground troops to combat against the enemy, deployment took on a new significance and urgency.

In the first weeks following this decision, specific authorities to deploy US forces were evolutionary and slower in coming than the JCS believed advisable. The authority to send units, especially major units, met resistance within government councils. Exact statements of authority were difficult to pin down since these were sometimes expressed in very broad terms as approvals "for planning purposes" and "in principle", developed over a period of time in discussions of various officials without a definite decision being identified. This procedure led occasionally to moments of misunderstanding concerning just what units, or how many men, had actually been approved for shipment as of a specific date. The need for forces was not always clearly understood nor was there, apparently, enough appreciation of the timing problem. In some cases the JCS had either to assume that authority had been granted, or that it would soon be granted, in order to get under way the very complicated and time-consuming arrangements necessary to take a unit from garrison, ready it for shipment, and place it in RVN, when it was needed, in combat ready condition. Of course, no movements were actually directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff until the authority had been clearly established, but had they waited for the final

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word before directing preliminary preparations, delays in arrival would have been considerably greater than they were.

During the spring of 1965 the decisions concerning deployments were affected by a number of inhibiting considerations. First was the possible adverse effect on the attitudes of the South Vietnamese and their government of a too large and rapid influx of troops. Such an influx might also stimulate the communist bloc to undesirable action. The drain on strategic reserves in CONUS and the possible effects on US commitments to NATO and on certain contingency plans had to be considered. Important too was the concern for logistics--that deployments should not outrun support capabilities. Finally, there was the fear that too-swift deployment would place US forces in exposed and dangerous positions and lead to increased casualty rates.

In later months other factors would become important. The effect of large deployments on the RVN economy would be particularly troublesome. Call-up of reserves, extension of active duty tours, and the general questions of force levels and the national military posture would all be considered in connection with deployments to SVN. However, by mid-1965 much had been accomplished in creating a wider understanding of the need for deployments and in smoothing out the detailed processes of planning, recommendations, and actions.

The Decision to Commit US Forces to Combat

At a NSC meeting at the White House on the night of 1 April, the question of the scale of deployment of US combat forces and the role to be played by those forces came to a head. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had assumed that the President's approval of General Johnson's 21 recommendations two weeks earlier had opened the way for more direct and effective actions in RVN but this assumption was not shared by all Presidential advisors. The discussions centered around a paper prepared within the Department of State and revised by members of the White House staff, setting forth proposed courses of action. This paper rejected deployment of the three-division force, assigned the Marines an "offensive enclave-quick reaction mission," and in other respects failed to reflect the expressed views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, objected, recalling for the President that on 15 March, it had been agreed that the United States was losing in the RVN and had to do something about it. What had to be done

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was to establish military control of selected critical areas in the country and the only way to do it was to go ahead and introduce three divisions. The consensus of other principals at this meeting opposed immediate introduction of these three divisions. Nevertheless, the President did approve modifying the mission of the Marines to permit their more active use under conditions to be established and approved by the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff interpreted this to mean their employment in "counterinsurgency combat operations." To support the Marines already ashore the President approved sending to Da Nang and Phu Bai two additional BLTs, one Marine F-4 squadron and command and control elements.¹

The President also approved sending the logistic and support units and personnel requested by CINCPAC, totalling 18,000-20,000 men and officers, to support US forces already in RVN, to prepare a logistics base, and to support the possible deployment of up to three US/Allied division forces. Although the President did not approve the deployment of this three-division force, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 2 April instructed the Joint Staff to draw up plans for such deployment on the basis that approval would probably be given for deployment of a full MEF, an Army division, and a ROK division.

At this same time the President directed that delivery of aircraft and helicopter reinforcements be expedited. In extension of his earlier efforts to stimulate other nations to send forces to RVN, President Johnson instructed the Secretary of State to see what could be done to induce the Republic of Korea, Australia, and New Zealand to deploy rapidly "significant combat elements" to RVN "in parallel" with the deployment of US Marines. These decisions were made on the evening of 1 April, although a proforma NSC meeting on the next morning covered the same ground.

On 5 April, the Secretary of Defense asked the JCS for a schedule setting forth in detail the actions necessary to

1. (TS) Msg, Wheeler to Westmoreland and Sharp, unnumbered, 3 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, April 65. (TS) NSAM 328 to SecState et al., 6 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (6 Apr 65) sec 1. Other instructions and approvals by the President contained in this NSAM will be covered in appropriate sections.

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introduce a two- or three-division force into RVN "at the earliest practicable date."²

In terms of numbers of men, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had thus far recommended the deployment to the RVN, "when needed," of 39,000 Marines to increase the MEB to an MEF; an Army Airmobile division of 26,000; and a Korean division force of 21,000. They had also "concurred" in the introduction of one Australian infantry battalion with supporting units; one New Zealand artillery battery; one New Zealand tank troop; and other New Zealand supporting units. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had also recommended deployment of a brigade from the 25th Infantry Division to Thailand.³

Beyond these, the cumulative recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made within the last two months, for deployment of Air Force units to Southeast Asia and WESTPAC constituted 5 TFS to Ubon, Kadena, Kung Kuan, and Takhlī; 4 TCS to Clark and Kadena; 2 RTF to Clark/Tan Son Nhut and Kadena; 5 EC-121 to Taiwan; 1 TFS to Itazuke and 2 TFS to Taiwan.⁴

CINCPAC Deployment Conference - 9 April

Underlying all of their considerations for deployment of combat troops was the recognition by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, heightened by General Meyer's and General Johnson's reports, of the logistic weaknesses in the RVN. Reflected in their planning and in their recommendations on deployment of forces in the next weeks and months was the determination of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that combat forces would not be sent in at a rate that would exceed the capability of the logistics base. It was first necessary therefore to determine just what this base must be. At the same time, in coordination with field commanders and Services, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had to work out the priorities for troop deployment and the optimum employment plans.

2. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 5 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 1.

3. (TS) Terms of Reference for Honolulu Conference, 7 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 65.

4. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 8528 to CINCPAC, 6 Apr 65.

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In order to develop answers to these matters, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed that a deployment conference be held at CINCPAC's headquarters starting on 9 April. Officers from the Joint Staff, the Services, the major commands, and the Defense Transportation Agency attended.

The Director, Joint Staff, General Burchinal, sent a message to Admiral Sharp on 6 April communicating the sense of urgency that the Joint Chiefs of Staff felt about deployments and over the need for sound but swift planning to accomplish them. "There is real concern," he said, "that the situation in I and II Corps may fall apart faster than we have taken cognizance of in our current preliminary planning." Citing the Secretary of Defense's call for a detailed plan to get US forces into RVN "at the earliest practicable date," Burchinal told CINCPAC, "We want to ram these log units in as rapidly as MACV wants them and we can send them. All here recognize the distinct possibility that we may have to send in the Marine and US Army division forces plus the balance of the air to meet a suddenly developing situation in SVN whether or not what we would like to have as a prepared logistic base has been established."⁵ The terms of reference furnished by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the deployment conference stipulated that plans be developed under two alternative movement schedules; 1) maximum feasible use of resources within present DOD authorities and; 2) the National Emergency level of transport capability. They also stated that priority attention should be given to the plans and movement schedules for the logistical and supporting units required by CINCPAC for; 1) support of personnel and forces already in or approved for deployment to RVN; 2) receipt and support in RVN of a three-division force; and 3) receipt and support of other US forces.⁶

CINCPAC had been told just before the conference that the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted the "expedited preparation" of a feasible time-phased deployment schedule for the 2,100-man Army Logistic Command, the 2,400-man Engineer Construction Group and other supporting logistic units amounting to between 13,500-15,500 men--all of which would support the current operations, three division forces, and the remaining Army and Air Force deployments approved or under consideration. Deployment of logistic forces, CINCPAC was assured, was not

5. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8507 to CINCPAC, 6 Apr 65.

6. (TS) Terms of Reference for Honolulu Conference,

7 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 65.

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contingent upon approval to deploy combat forces but the planning for combat forces must go on concurrently with the planning for logistic force deployments. These deployments might be concurrent and CINCPAC was therefore enjoined to maintain maximum flexibility in the availability of airlift.⁷

The conference at Honolulu from 8-10 April 1965 resulted in a CINCPAC deployment plan for logistic and combat forces to Southeast Asia, which was forwarded to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 10 April. Pointing to the capabilities of the VC, the NVN, and Communist China to seize all or parts of the RVN, the plan presented a deployment concept to meet the threat, to improve US posture to deter overt aggression, and to provide a capability for countering aggression should it occur. Generally the current situation required the stationing of US and allied ground forces in critically threatened areas of RVN and a small combatant ground force in Thailand, as well as additional air units in RVN, Thailand, and WESTPAC. With respect to US ground forces, the plan proposed that they be assigned initially to base security missions, and, once bases were secure, phase into counterinsurgency missions in coordination with the RVNAF. Operations would be mounted from secure, logistically supportable bases in a campaign of increasing strength against the VC. Deployments would be made in progressive increments which could be so controlled that if certain forces were obviously not needed they could be cancelled. The progressive deployments would fall into four phases: Phase I - Increase security of vital US installations and secure US enclaves in coastal areas. Occupy and improve coastal enclaves and support RVNAF operations from them; Phase 2 - Conduct operations from enclaves; Phase 3 - Secure US inland bases and areas; Phase 4 - Occupy and improve US inland bases and conduct operations from them.⁸

Initial deployments would take place through the coastal enclaves. Major units and supporting forces and the enclaves through which they would be introduced were listed. The plan was given to the Director, J-4, for consideration in

7. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 8528 to CINCPAC, 6 Apr 65.

8. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC Deployment Plan for Logistic and Combat Forces to Southeast Asia--Deployment Planning Conference, HQ PACOM, 8-10 Apr 65, 10 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 64) sec 1.

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connection with the overall deployment planning study desired by the Secretary of Defense.

The 173d Airborne Brigade

General Westmoreland doubted that deployment of division sized forces was "in the immediate offing," even though preparations for their deployment were being pressed with some urgency. He recommended on 11 April, therefore, that the 173d Airborne Brigade be deployed from Okinawa into Bien Hoa/Vung Tau. He said that its deployment was as much a military necessity as the deployment of the Marines to Da Nang/Phu Bai. He cited the threat from strong VC main force units in the eastern III CTZ, which could attack the eastern flank of the Hop Tac area and major US and GVN installations in the area. The Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area contained two major US bases essential for current operations and for the safety of US personnel in the Saigon area. Bien Hoa, for example, was the major USAF and VNAF fighter base. All A-1Es were based there. The B-57s at Bien Hoa carried out over 75 percent of the in-country jet support of the RVNAF. An Army brigade stationed in the area would not only strengthen its security but could be flown quickly to the highlands area in event of a VC attack there.⁹

CINCPAC agreed with COMUSMACV, and recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the 173d Airborne Brigade be sent at once. However, he asked that action also be taken at the same time to replace the brigade in RVN as soon as possible with a US Army brigade from the CONUS so that the 173d might be sent back to Okinawa as PACOM reserve.¹⁰

The JCS Deployment Plan

Meeting on 12 April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff addressed themselves to the preliminary recommendations of the J-4 on the deployment study and directed certain changes and gave some specific guidance. They directed that the deployment

9. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MACJ 11682 to CINCPAC, 11 Apr 65, JCS IN 11366.

10. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 132235Z Apr 65, JCS IN 14207.

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concept, based on that of the CINCPAC plan, be expanded into a three division/nine squadron deployment plan and time schedule. The plan should consider creating some kind of combined tactical headquarters in northern RVN to coordinate counterinsurgency operations near the I and II Corps enclaves. It should counter major attacks by NVN forces, either from across the DMZ or from in-country assembly areas. General Westmoreland's bid for the early deployment of the 173d Airborne Brigade to Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area should be given special attention. The J-4 should plan on deploying the Air Mobile division, recommended by the Chief of Staff, Army, and should plan on having the first RCT of the ROK division in RVN in 180 days. The deployment plan should also provide for the deployment of the 18,000-20,000-man logistic force approved by the President to establish the base for the three-division forces--which would be landed in enclaves in the Hue/Phu Bai-Da Nang area, the Chu Lai/Qui Nhon/Nha Trang area, and the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area.¹¹

On 13 April the Secretary of Defense approved, subject to country clearance, the deployment of the 173d Airborne Brigade to the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area from Okinawa.¹²

The Joint Chiefs of Staff assigned responsibility for deployment of CONUS Army and Air Force units to CINCSRIKE/USCINCMFAFSA on 14 April. After the troop lists had been finalized and authority granted for deployment, and after the Chief of Staff, Army, and/or Chief of Staff, Air Force, had determined units to be combat ready, they would transfer operational command of these units to CINCSRIKE/USCINCMFAFSA.¹³

On 17 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to Secretary McNamara the plan for deployment about which he had inquired on 5 April. The concept, based essentially on that developed in the CINCPAC plan and earlier advocated by the Commandant, Marine Corps, called for the establishment of secure bases along the coast of RVN into which US forces

11. (TS) Note to Control Div, "J-4 5-65/J-3 TP 19-65," 12 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 2.

12. (TS-GP 4) JCS 2343/564-4, 14 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 2.

13. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 9375 to CSA et al., 19 Apr 65.

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would be introduced and from which they would conduct "combat counterinsurgency operations" against the VC. It would be necessary, in order to improve the logistic base needed to support combat elements, to send in some logistic forces first. Other US ground forces, with their support elements, would be needed in Thailand to "add deterrent strength," and to have forces in the area in the event of an attack by NVN or Communist China. Air Force units would be needed in forward areas of the Western Pacific to deter aggression, to strengthen operational forces engaged in Laos, NVN, and in RVN, and to improve reconnaissance and airlift capabilities.¹⁴

The concept of operations given the Secretary of Defense paralleled that of the CINCPAC plan and provided for the same four phases. Initial locations for the first units would be: 1) III MEF - Hue/Da Nang/Chu Lai; 2) US Airmobile Division - Qui Nhon/Nha Trang; 3) ROK Division Force - Quang Ngai/Chu Lai; 4) 173d Airborne Brigade - Bien Hoa/Vung Tau.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff foresaw that in order to deploy the logistical forces into the enclaves, combat forces would have to provide security for the initial and subsequent deployments, and for construction and maintenance operations. The III MEF would secure airfields, conduct combat counterinsurgency operations, and be prepared to repel any overt NVN/CHICOM attacks in the area of its responsibility. The Army Airmobile Division, from its bases in the coastal area, would also conduct operations against the VC "as directed by COMUSMACV in the highlands or elsewhere as required by the situation," but only when "logistically feasible." The division would stay ready to defend in the central highlands in case of a NVN/CHICOM attack, and would help keep friendly control of coastal communications. The ROK division would be deployed into the Quang Ngai/Chu Lai area only after the Marines had secured the area initially; once ashore, it would expand to the Tam Ky area. It would conduct base security and counterinsurgency operations. The 173d Airborne Brigade, scheduled to provide security and to conduct counterinsurgency operations in the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area, would be replaced by another brigade from the CONUS as soon as practicable in order to return to Okinawa. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, anticipating

14. (GP 1) JCSM-288-65 to SecDef, 17 Apr 65 (derived from JCS 2343/564-5), JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 3.

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the possible need for a higher echelon field command, also informed the Secretary of Defense that a tailored-down US Army Corps headquarters and minimal corps troops would be sent to RVN when and if required.

The deployments that the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended supported the deployment troop list proposed by CINCPAC. Movement schedules could not be put into final form until the Secretary had made final decisions, and the priority of movement and method of travel would depend on CINCPAC's requests. The initial proposed deployments included 17,100 men from the logistic forces authorized, as well as 14,000 Marines for the MEF and the 4,000-man Airborne Brigade. If necessary decisions and country clearances were forthcoming, the United States would have more than 35,000 men in RVN by 15 July. In addition a brigade of the 25th Infantry Division would be deployed to Thailand where it would be charged with providing security and stability in northeast Thailand.

Forty percent of MATS capability would be reserved to insure movement of essential resupply, channel, and special mission traffic, and to provide a reasonable degree of flexibility to meet emergency situations which might arise. Air and sealift requirements for movement of resupply and replacements would increase proportionately in Southeast Asia as these deployments took place. Of necessity only the most urgently needed personnel and items of supply would be airlifted. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the Secretary of Defense approve their plan as a basis for further planning.¹⁵

Ambassador Taylor's Objections

During the development of the 17 April deployment plan, Ambassador Taylor had raised objections to further deployment. While they did not share the Ambassador's views, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were nevertheless obliged to take them into consideration as an important factor that could inhibit deployment if not satisfactorily answered.

Ambassador Taylor had taken an active part in NSC discussions at which the President had decided to send more US

15. Ibid.

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troops and to commit some US forces to combat. In some respects he supported this change in policy, but in other respects he was less than enthusiastic. As Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, in 1964, General Taylor had opposed the introduction of US combat forces into RVN and had repeated this opposition in February 1965. Although now convinced by the worsening situation that some modification of this stand was necessary, he still doubted that the situation called for the introduction of large numbers of US fighting men and counseled a moderate approach.

Ambassador Taylor agreed that the 18,000-20,000-man logistic buildup was needed and he urged its rapid implementation. He believed that "... engineers can be very useful in SVN whether or not we ever introduce additional divisions."¹⁶

Ambassador Taylor did not believe that US divisions were needed urgently. He did not fear, for example, that I and II Corps areas were "about to fall apart." And in any event, if a debacle were going to occur in the next few months the United States could not possibly prepare logistically in time. That Taylor was not privy to the planning taking place in Washington was evident from his "understanding" that "... if the Marines demonstrate effectiveness in operating out of Da Nang in an offensive counterinsurgency role, other offensive enclaves may be established along the coast and garrisoned with brigade-size contingents for employment similar to the Marines." He recommended that logistic preparations be started at once to establish support at Bien Hoa/Vung Tau and at Qui Nhon for US brigades. This would allow later introduction of larger forces if necessary. He wanted this done rapidly enough to make a contribution "to the situation which is now unfolding."¹⁷

The Joint Chiefs of Staff notified CINCPAC on 14 April that at the "earliest feasible" time after receipt of country clearance, he should deploy the 173d Airborne Brigade and necessary supporting elements to the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area and expand its mission to include counterinsurgency combat operations.¹⁸

16. (S) Msg, Saigon 3332 to State, 12 Apr 65, JCS IN 11893.

17. Ibid.

18. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 9012 to CINCPAC et al., 14 Apr 65.

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When Ambassador Taylor saw the JCS instructions to CINCPAC he was apparently puzzled. He cabled Washington, also on 14 April, saying, "This comes as a complete surprise in view of the understanding reached in Washington that we would experiment with the Marines in a counterinsurgency role before bringing in other U.S. contingents." He recommended that the deployment of the 173d be held up "until we can sort out all matters relating to it."19

Ambassador Taylor was even more surprised and displeased by the landing of Marine Forces at Da Nang with 155mm and 8" howitzers and with tanks. He cabled Secretary Rusk that "This action is highly embarrassing to me and contravenes the decisions bearing on the Marine deployments taken in Washington during my recent visit as I understand them." He pointed out that the inclusion of heavy weapons in the Marine armament was inappropriate to counterinsurgency operations and would encourage critics of US policy who charged that the United States was more interested in fighting Red China than the VC. Ambassador Taylor was particularly concerned about Prime Minister Quat's possible reaction. He did not feel it would be wise now to take the weapons out, however, since that would only compound the mistake by drawing attention to it. "I shall try to explain this affair to Quat in such a way as not to encourage the suspicion that we are slipping units into SVN without his knowledge."20

The Ambassador was disturbed by the pace of recent actions to introduce US ground forces into RVN. He charged that this created an impression of eagerness in some quarters that he found difficult to understand. "I should think," he said, "that for both military and political reasons we should be most reluctant to tie down Army/Marine units in this country and would do so only after the presentation of the most convincing evidence of the necessity."

Before the introduction of the initial Marine units into the Da Nang area, there had been, Ambassador Taylor asserted, four reasons for so doing. One of these, the need to convince the GVN of US determination to stand by them, had already been

19. (28) Msg, Saigon 3373 to State, 14 Apr 65, JCS IN 14875.

20. (18) Msg, Saigon 3374 to State, 14 Apr 65, JCS IN 14792.

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accomplished by the original deployment. Three other possible reasons remained: 1) the need to take care of military tasks which the RVNAF could not handle; 2) the need to take care of military tasks faster than the RVNAF could do without assistance; 3) the desirability of providing forces to meet possible future crises and contingencies.²¹

Ambassador Taylor pointed out that these three arguments could be used to justify almost unlimited deployments of US ground forces. He also warned that the mounting number of US troops could sap RVN initiative and turn the counterinsurgency into a US war against the VC. The Chinese could use these deployments as an excuse for pressing military reinforcements on Hanoi. Frictions would grow between the GVN and its allies and it would become increasingly difficult to keep GVN and US policies on parallel lines.

A consideration of the disadvantages convinces me that; while logistic preparations should be made now to be able to receive additional forces, the forces themselves should be held outside of SVN just as long as possible and until their need is uncontroversial. From a purely military point of view, it is essentially wasteful of the specialized mobility of Marines and airborne troops to commit them prematurely to restricted land areas. Politically, it is undesirable to seek authority for their introduction until a clear and specific need exists which assures them an unreserved welcome from their GVN hosts.²²

Prompted by Ambassador Taylor's objections, the Joint Chiefs of Staff clarified further their position on deployment to the Secretary of Defense. In effect, their views, forwarded to Secretary McNamara in a memorandum on 15 April, constituted a rationale for actions already taken and those planned. With respect to the Ambassador's recommendation that the deployment of the 173d Airborne Brigade be delayed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that the security of major US air operational and logistic installations in the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area was judged to be in a precarious state. ARVN forces could not be counted on to protect these facilities without overstretching their own counterinsurgency

21. (S) Msg, Saigon 3384 to State, 14 Apr 65, JCS IN 14992.

22. Ibid.

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capabilities. The deployment of the Airborne Brigade, recommended and desired both by General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp, was in keeping with approved contingency plans. The Joint Chiefs of Staff therefore supported the earliest possible deployment of this unit both for a security mission and to take part in counterinsurgency combat operations when ready.²³

Ambassador Taylor's strong objection to bringing in combat forces additional to the Marines already ashore was answered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the grounds that the situation in SVN clearly required the deployment of more Marine and Army troops. There were not sufficient troops to provide security for the approved base developments at Chu Lai and to provide at the same time the maneuver units for the approved counterinsurgency operations against the VC. The planned expansion of the logistics base in the Qui Nhon/Nha Trang area called for combat troops to protect the base areas, and this deployment, a brigade of two battalions, should be completed during April and May. The Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that they were confident the Ambassador could induce Prime Minister Quat to approve acceptance of these forces.²⁴

The surprise and embarrassment caused the Ambassador by the landing of armor and artillery with the Marines was outweighed by the military necessity. The equipment with which the Marines had landed was standard equipment. "At no time had the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed that these units be landed in South Vietnam in any configuration other than fully combat-equipped and combat-ready . . ." the Joint Chiefs of Staff said.²⁵

Ambassador Taylor's objections to accelerated deployment elicited a strong response from another quarter when Mr. McGeorge Bundy, the President's Assistant, informed him on the same day that the President was all in favor of further troop deployments. The President believed that additional US troops "are important if not decisive reinforcement." The President had not seen any negative results from the deployments to date. He did not, the Ambassador was informed, "wish to wait any longer than is essential for genuine GVN agreement." The

23. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-281-65 to SecDef, 15 Apr 65, (derived from JCS 2343/575), JMF 9155.3 (14 Apr 65).

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

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President had always intended, however, that before any deployment would be made, Ambassador Taylor would review it with Prime Minister Quat first, Bundy stated, adding, "we regret any contrary impression given by our messages in recent days."²⁶

Deployment of Additional Forces

Prompted possibly by the differing views that were being expressed on deployments by various responsible officials and by the necessity to examine the JCS deployment plan in face-to-face meeting with the commanders responsible in the RVN, Secretary McNamara called for a deployment planning conference to be held in Honolulu on 19-20 April. In addition to himself, those attending the conference were Ambassador Taylor, General Wheeler, Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland, Mr. William Bundy, and Mr. McNaughton. Just prior to this conference the Joint Chiefs of Staff had, on 17 April, sent to CINCPAC a message informing him that the deployment of about 5,000 Marines had been approved for planning purposes "at the highest level." General Wheeler learned of this message at a preconference briefing in Honolulu. He immediately cabled General Goodpaster in Washington stating that he was unaware of any such approval for sending additional Marines to the RVN and asking for an explanation.²⁷

On the next day General Goodpaster replied to the Chairman, saying that the assumption that approval had been granted for 5,000 additional Marines had arisen out of a meeting with the President. Subsequent to this meeting the Joint Chiefs of Staff had, in the absence of the Chairman, "compared their recollections of discussion of additional Marines with the President." The consensus was that the Commandant, Marine Corps, had advised the President that more than the 9,000 Marines then in RVN would be needed if Marines were to conduct counterinsurgency combat operations. The present MEB would be unable to do much beyond local security. He had suggested putting in the remainder of the Marine Division (MEF), amounting to about 22,000 men. The President had stated that this was

26. (TS) Msg, State 2332 to Saigon, 15 Apr 65, JCS IN 08968.

27. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9310 to CINCPAC, 17 Apr 65; (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 192319Z Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 65; (TS) Memo, SecDef to Pres, 21 Apr 65, OCJCS File 337, Honolulu Conference, Apr 65.

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beyond what he could do. But he had said, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had agreed (although their discussion of the matter had been "diffuse"), that he "would agree to go up to 5,000." This discussion at the White House had been coupled with a discussion of having US and ARVN battalions operate as teams in combined operations.²⁸

"Although not all of these points were recalled with the same clarity by all of the Chiefs," General Goodpaster told General Wheeler, "they did put this together as their understanding of the matter." General Greene now suggested that the matter of the composition and concept for employment of the additional Marines be discussed at the Honolulu conference. Presidential advisor Bundy, who had been present during the meeting with the President, did not recall any particular size of Marine force as having received any specific endorsement and believed that the matter should be resolved at Honolulu.²⁹

The deployment of additional Marines to Chu Lai came under discussion at the Honolulu Conference, but as part of the broader question of overall deployments. The Secretary of Defense apparently believed that the "three division" deployment plan proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 17 April called for too many forces. After considerable discussion the conferees decided to reduce considerably the scale of deployment from that recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at least initially. On 21 April the Secretary of Defense, in a memorandum to the President, reported, "all recommend" that, in addition to the 2,000 ROK and 33,500 US troops already in-country, forces be deployed to RVN on the following schedule: 1 US Army brigade space (4,000) at Bien Hoa/Vung Tau, closing 1 May; 3 US Marine air squadrons and 3 Marine battalions (6,200) at Chu Lai, closing 5 May; 1 Australian battalion (1,250) at Vung Tau, closing 21 May; 1 US Army brigade (4,000) at Qui Nhon/Nha Trang, closing 15 June; 1 Korean RCT (4,000) at Quang Ngai, closing 15 June. Adding to these forces those augmentation and logistic troops already approved and the logistics troops not yet approved, the Secretary derived a total force in RVN of 82,000 US and 7,250 third country troops.

28. (S) Msg, Exec to CJCS 201641Z to CJCS, Apr 65.
OCJCS File 337, Honolulu Conference, Apr 65.

29. Ibid.

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"Possible later deployments, not recommended now," the Secretary of Defense informed the President, "include a US Airmobile division (9 bns-15,800) to Pleiku/Kontum, and I Corps Hq (1,200) to Nha Trang; and even later, the remainder of the Korean division (6 bns-14,500) to Quang Ngai, and the remainder of the Marine Expeditionary Force (3 bns-24,800) to DaNang."³⁰

The Secretary of Defense also recommended to the President that he inform the "Congressional leadership" of the contemplated deployments and of the changed mission for US forces in RVN.³¹

Upon returning from Honolulu, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, met with the President, the Secretary of State and others at the White House on the morning of 22 April to discuss the deployment recommendations developed at Honolulu. No decisions on deployments were forthcoming at this meeting. General Wheeler pointed out that the adverse developments some had feared if US troops were introduced and other actions taken (such as increased use of US planes in the RVN) had not come about. The VNAF had increased its own efforts and the people had not risen in revolt against entry of US troops. Also discussed at the meeting were the role of Australian forces and command arrangements.

On the basis of the deployment recommendations made at the Honolulu meeting, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in a memorandum on 30 April, provided the Secretary of Defense with a "program including a concept and force composition for deployment" of the forces that the President had been advised should be deployed.³²

The JCS Plan, 30 April

Based generally on the same concept the Joint Chiefs of Staff had presented to the Secretary of Defense on 17 April,

30. (TS) Memo, SecDef to Pres, 21 Apr 65, OGCJCS File 337, Honolulu Conference, Apr 65.

31. Ibid.

32. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-321-65 to SecDef, 30 Apr 65, (derived from JCS 2343/564-7), JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 3.

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this latest deployment plan provided for the deployment of the two US Army brigades, a MEB, a ROK RCT, an ANZAC battalion force, and logistic and augmentation forces of about 32,000 men and officers. Although forces had been reduced from the original plan, Marine, Army, and ROK units were still to enter and secure the enclaves as originally proposed. The ANZAC battalion would deploy to the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area with the US Airborne Brigade.³³

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also listed the possible later deployments to RVN that might be required, giving desired closing dates. These would entail deploying the Army air mobile division and the Army Corps Headquarters, to RVN by 1 August, with the remainder of a ROK division and the MEF deploying by 1 October.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that Secretary McNamara approve for implementation the deployments proposed and that he authorize the deployments of the I MEF from the west coast of the United States to constitute a reserve force for the Marines in WESTPAC, replacing the III MEF as it was deployed into RVN.

The Secretary of Defense did not approve the JCS plan until two weeks later. But in the interim, part of the deployment recommended in the plan were carried out.

At a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 28 April, during discussions leading to a decision on the deployment plan forwarded two days later, the Chairman had instructed the Joint Staff to draft a message to CINCPAC authorizing a "go ahead" on the introduction of the 173d Airborne Brigade into the Bien Hao/Vung Tau area and 3 Marine battalions and 3 air squadrons into Chu Lai in early May. This message would be "surfaced" only after the Secretary of Defense approved these deployments. The GVN had already granted clearance for entry of these forces.³⁴

33. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-321-65 to SecDef, 30 Apr 65 (derived from JCS 2343/564-7), JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 3.

34. (TS) Note to Control Div "Deployment of Forces to South Vietnam (U)," 20 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 4. (TS) Msg, Saigon 3511 to State, 27 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Apr 65.

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The President approved this cable on the morning of 30 April. The Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the movements carried out, sending the execute message to CINCPAC on the same day it was approved.³⁵

With the deployment of the second MEB, the III MEF would have ashore seven of its nine battalions. Upon completion of an airstrip seven squadrons of Marine aircraft would be deployed in RVN. The Marine Corps therefore asked to deploy to Da Nang a reduced strength Force/Division/Wing headquarters to include two Major Generals, one commanding the division and the other commanding the wing. General Westmoreland had no objections to this arrangement, but he wanted to be sure, since the press would undoubtedly report that a Marine division had been deployed, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff fully understood and approved such a deployment.³⁶

On 5 May COMUSMACV informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, at a meeting of the US Mission Council, concern had been expressed over the use of the term Marine Expeditionary Force. The sensitive word was "Expeditionary" which was reminiscent to the Vietnamese of the French Expeditionary Force (Corps Expeditionnaire Francais en Extreme Orient), an organization infamous in Vietnamese history. Westmoreland therefore suggested that the name of the III MEF be changed.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC and COMUSMACV on the same day that they had no objection to the deployment of the Division/Wing headquarters to include the general officers. This deployment would not be identified as the III MEF, but as the III Marine Amphibious Force (MAF). Other Marine organizations deploying to RVN in the future would have their titles modified to replace "expeditionary" with "amphibious" when appropriate.³⁷

The III MAF was established at Da Nang on 6 May. Additional Marines landed at Chu Lai on the next day. The 173d Airborne Brigade arrived in the RVN at the same date.³⁸

35. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 1141 to CINCPAC, 30 Apr 65.

36. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 14432 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 2 May 65, JCS IN 40071.

37. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1510 to CINCPAC, 5 May 65.

38. (S) Marine Corps, Commandant's Vietnam Chronology, 1965, p. 174.

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The Secretary of Defense, on 15 May, approved for planning purposes the deployments that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended on 30 April. In addition, he authorized the "continuation of the preparation cycle" for the deployment of the Army brigade to Qui Nhon, and the deployment of individual personnel augmentations. These two actions would bring the total manpower authorization for US forces in RVN to over 69,000. He also approved deployment of elements of the I MEF from the CONUS to WESTPAC to replace elements of the III MEF sent to RVN. He informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that approval for the deployment of the ANZAC battalion force and the ROK RCT already existed.³⁹

"The other deployments described," the Secretary of Defense concluded, "will be considered in conjunction with continuing high-level deliberations on the Southeast Asian situation and as further requested by the Joint Chiefs of Staff."⁴⁰

Experimental Programs

During the Conference at Honolulu, the problems associated with an experimental program, part of which had been based on ideas originating with the President, were examined and discussed by Secretary McNamara and the other top officials. This program of specific and unusual actions had been sent to Ambassador Taylor, Admiral Sharp, and General Westmoreland in a joint State-Defense message approved by the President on 15 April. According to the cable, the President believed the situation in RVN to be deteriorating to the extent that not only actions against NVN but an entirely new approach in the South must be added to achieve victory. The Ambassador and the field commanders were told that "we believe" that experimental steps must be taken to that end. The first such step would be the "experimental encadrement" of RVNAF units with US forces. General Westmoreland was told to develop two plans, one to integrate about 50 US soldiers into each of several ARVN battalions, the other involving the combined operations of about three US battalions with three or more RVN combat battalions. More orthodox, and already part of the concept developed in Washington, was the instruction to plan for

39. (28-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to JCS, 15 May 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 4.

40. Ibid.

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stationing a "brigade force" in the Bien Hoa/Vung Tau area and for introducing a battalion or multi-battalion force in such coastal locations as Qui Nhon ". . . to experiment further with US forces in a counter-insurgency role. . . ." A total of nine US battalions would be involved.⁴¹

At the same time COMUSMACV was directed to work with GVN officials to make detailed plans for a substantial expansion of the Vietnamese recruiting campaign, making full use of US experts and methods. Further, the Surgeon General of the US Army had been instructed to work with General Westmoreland in developing an experimental program for providing expanded medical services to the countryside, using mobile dispensaries. COMUSMACV was also to set up a plan for introducing US Army Civil Affairs personnel into the structure of provincial governments in one or two provinces, hopefully to help create stable government in these provinces and to start and maintain much-needed political, economic, and security programs. A further experiment called for the provision and direct distribution of food to regular and paramilitary personnel of the RVN and their families.

The Ambassador was instructed to discuss all these experimental programs urgently with Prime Minister Quat. General Westmoreland was to be prepared to discuss his plans for the military programs with General Wheeler at the conferences in Honolulu during the next week.⁴²

On the same day Mr. McGeorge Bundy informed Ambassador Taylor that the President himself had been the inspiration for the encadrement idea and for the use of US Civil Affairs teams.⁴³

During the Honolulu discussions of these proposals, General Westmoreland came out strongly against individual encadrement of ARVN units. He stated, however, that he did plan to assign ARVN liaison personnel to each independent US platoon and to "brigade" US forces with ARVN troops in counterinsurgency actions. Furthermore, he proposed to set

41. (TS-GP 1) Msg, DEF 9164 to Saigon et al., 15 Apr 65.

42. Ibid.

43. (TS) Msg, State 2332 to Saigon, 15 Apr 65, JCS IN 08968.

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up an International Mobile Security Task Force which would contain third-country as well as ARVN and US forces.⁴⁴

In the matter of recruiting, both Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland stated that no additional US recruiting "expertise" was needed in RVN. The bottlenecks were not techniques to get recruits, but in such areas as training facilities, trainers, and leadership. These problems, they said, were being surmounted, and they expected an increase of 127,000 men in the RVNAF, paramilitary forces and police in the next 12 months.⁴⁵

The expansion of medical services in the countryside, with the assistance of the Surgeon General, US Army, was welcomed by Ambassador Taylor. It was decided that a representative of the Surgeon General would come to the RVN at once to work with COMUSMACV and USOM in developing a detailed program.⁴⁶

It was also agreed that an experimental program would be begun in three provinces, introducing US Army civil affairs personnel or similarly qualified personnel into the provincial government structure. The experimental food program that had been proposed was not considered necessary by the Ambassador or COMUSMACV. Both agreed that there was no evidence of any food shortage among the families of the RVNAF or paramilitary personnel. They would, however, begin a study to improve the "fringe benefits" for the forces and their families.⁴⁷

The Secretary of Defense reported these views on the experimental program to the President in his memorandum of 21 April.

Expansion of the Logistics Base

In mid-April the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended other logistic actions beyond the deployment of the logistic forces. They considered that the ports of Quang Ngai, Qui Nhon,

44. (TS) Memo, SecDef to Pres, 21 Apr 65, OCJCS File 337, Honolulu Conference, Apr 65.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

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Da Nang and Nha Trang should be developed to support the expected input of men and supplies. They recommended "minimum essential base development" in the enclave areas, and the improvement of airfield facilities, including those at Tam Ky, for light aviation. They recommended also the development of Chu Lai with emphasis on the immediate installation of a Short Expeditionary Landing Field (SELF). The prepositioning of US Army lighterage at selected ports had already been approved and was being implemented.⁴⁸

POL facilities that would have to be constructed comprised unloading and storage facilities at Da Nang, Quang Ngai, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon, Vung Tau, and storage facilities at Saigon, Bien Hoa, Tan Son Nhut and Pleiku. The Army Engineer Construction Group would commence work on high priority projects for COMUSMACV. Expansion of the construction capability would take place as the follow-on construction units were approved for deployment. Navy Mobile Construction units attached to the III MEF would accomplish the SELF installation. Additional airfield construction requirements might mean that as many as two or more construction battalions would be needed in RVN.

To increase the logistic capability of the United States in the Southeast Asia area, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended broader actions outside RVN. Among these were: 1) expediting country-to-country agreements for the acquisition of real estate; 2) increasing POL and ammo storage capacity at Subic Bay, Philippine Islands; 3) preparing and improving LST ramps at Iwakuni, Japan; 4) improving pier and beach-outload facilities at Okinawa; 5) providing facilities for aerial port detachment at King Kuan; 6) suspending gold flow restrictions in the PACOM area in order that necessary supplies and services might be procured offshore to facilitate preparation for receipt of additional forces in RVN; 7) increasing the capability of Okinawa and the Philippine Islands as offshore supporting bases.

Also in April, Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland had been deeply involved in determining how and to what extent the US logistic base in RVN should be expanded to support the commitment of US and third-country troops and how to coordinate such an expansion with the RVNAF. The

⁴⁸. Ibid. (78-GP 1) JCSM-288-65 to SecDef, 17 Apr 65 (derived from JCS 2343/564-5), JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 3.

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central problem was to choose the best of the several options in current logistic procedures and the possible combined use of physical logistic facilities already in existence. In this connection, the Army had expressed "considerable doubt" as to the feasibility or desirability of combined use of logistic facilities.⁴⁹

In order to make easier the stockage of common-user consumable items of Classes II, III, IV and V supply, the Joint Chiefs of Staff undertook consideration of a procedure in which the United States would retain title to such stores until "convenient point of issue of item in country to recipient." This would, of course, raise problems in relationships between the RVNAF and US logistic personnel.

On 7 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out to CINCPAC that the United States might share RVNAF depot or supply facilities. They also suggested that the title to stocks might even revert to the United States. "US personnel could take over management and essentially, if not actually, combined command or coordination of mutually occupied logistic facilities if major stockages were of common user consumables," the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted. This course would have the advantage of allowing rapid availability to the United States of existing facilities, although some might not be capable of expansion. It would simplify programming for the Services for all consumables and would allow establishment of in-country stock levels on the basis of gross consumption forecasts, for the combined totals for all forces. On the other hand substantial opposition from the RVNAF High Command could certainly be expected. Admiral Sharp was asked to comment on these procedures.⁵⁰

In reply, CINCPAC informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that his current planning counted on the optimum use of those facilities already existing and in operation. However, just how much the United States could control these facilities would have to be determined at the time of need and on a case-by-case basis. He seriously doubted that the RVNAF would agree to turning over their logistic support facilities to the United States any more than the United States would agree to turning over command of its combat forces to the GVN. Moreover, RVNAF facilities were already overcrowded or

49. (S-NOFORN) Msg, JCS 8654 to CINCPAC, 7 Apr 65.

50. Ibid.

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too small, and many of them were wrongly located for support of US forces as envisioned under current deployment plans. He also pointed out that access to the base depot area near Saigon was "less than fully secure."51

CINCPAC believed that the best way to expand the US logistic system in RVN would be to establish as rapidly as possible a framework so conceived that it could be expanded to support any US effort. This would require a base complex at a deep-water port easily accessible from the sea, centrally located and under US control. He stated that the only feasible location for such a facility would be at Cam Ranh Bay. When the base depot became operational, a central control point for all supplies would be set up and all supplies coming into RVN would be controlled by a central stock record office and transceiver point. The office would control the flow of all critical MAP equipment and the common user consumables for all deployed forces. "Issue to the RVNAF of these items could be managed in such a manner as to best serve US interests and apply the required logistical leverage," CINCPAC stated. If a high degree of common user commodities, such as ammunition, were involved, selected supply lines could be completely integrated and the system expanded as necessary so that key items might be controlled without physically sending all supply through the base depot.

By leaving the present RVNAF depot system intact, but collocating US facilities at these installations, when such action were feasible and in the best interests of the United States, the RVNAF objections to US take-over of the logistic system could be overcome. CINCPAC pointed out that development of a base at Cam Ranh Bay would be expensive and would call for "significant construction effort" because of the lack of even minimum essential facilities there at the present time. The Services would have to fund pipelining, and control MAP equipment, including common user consumables and depot stocks. Sizeable combat forces would be tied down in providing security for the complex. Distribution from the depot to field depots would mainly be done by coastal shipping in LSTs.

51. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 152046Z May 65, JCS IN 62873.

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"In summary," he said, "I believe it is essential to begin establishment of a base depot complex at a deep-water port (Cam Ranh Bay) to support US forces initially. The depot activity and control would be capable of expansion."52

Development of Cam Ranh Bay

In April and May, as more and more troops began arriving in RVN and as the tonnage of supplies and equipments mushroomed, it became apparent that Saigon logistic facilities would very soon be inadequate. With the prospect of an even greater flow of men and supplies, in the months just ahead, the need for an additional deep-water port, more centrally located with respect to the forces and contemplated operations, grew to near-crisis proportions. The most suitable location for such a port was at Cam Ranh Bay. Cam Ranh Bay was an ideal location with all the necessary attributes for a major military port. US officials had been considering construction of such a port at Cam Ranh since 1964, even before the present urgency had arisen.

On 19 May 1965 the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) asked that the Joint Staff evaluate the requirement for a logistic base at Cam Ranh Bay on two assumptions: 1) that the additional deployments then being considered would be authorized and; 2) that no further major deployment would be made. On 21 May, General Wheeler informed Secretary McNamara that "a requirement for a US installation at Cam Ranh Bay exists under either of the assumptions" Under the first assumption the base would be expanded to accommodate the additional troops being deployed, including those for OPLAN 32-64, and under the second assumption a requirement for base facilities on a reduced scale would still exist. A supplemental appropriation already contained provision for \$7 million for ammunition and port facilities at Cam Ranh Bay. CINCPAC was planning to consolidate some of the logistic facilities programmed for Qui Nhon and Nha Trang at Cam Ranh Bay. This was being done because General Westmoreland had determined recently that Cam Ranh Bay could be secured against the VC by the forces then being planned for the Qui Nhon and Nha Trang enclaves. Admiral Sharp was in the process of preparing an outline base development plan for Cam Ranh Bay. "Under these circumstances," General Wheeler told the Secretary of

52. Ibid.

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Defense, "it is believed appropriate for the Ambassador to initiate discussions with the Prime Minister to advise him of the US intent to establish a deep water port and ammunition storage facilities at Cam Ranh Bay; as well as the possibility of the expansion of these facilities to provide other logistic services to the United States, Republic of Vietnam, and third country forces."53

Secretary McNamara had suggested the building of a logistic and combat airfield in connection with Cam Rahn Bay development. CINCPAC was also conducting therefore a preliminary engineer survey for such an airfield in the northern end of the Cam Ranh Peninsula.54

On 30 May CINCPAC submitted a detailed statement and review of the need for Cam Ranh Bay development with recommendations for a logistics complex, a jet-capable combat/logistics airfield, and deployment of the additional forces that would be needed or that could be stationed there. The logistic objective would be to establish a US base with central control of common-user items for all deployed forces, including key items for the RVNAF. Through this deep-water port, shipments could be received directly from the CONUS, Okinawa and other Pacific bases. Supplies would be moved from Cam Ranh Bay by coastal shipping and by air and land LOCs throughout the year. The United States, using MAP funds, had already constructed a large deep-water pier for its own use. Because of the natural contour of the beach, dry ramp beaching of LSTs was also possible.55

The estimated cost for all development except the airfield was \$19 million, of which \$7 million had already been programmed and \$9.6 million, originally programmed in the Army MCP, was being shifted from the logistic and support facilities initially scheduled at Vung Tau. Additional funds to meet the cost of development, CINCPAC anticipated, could be taken from other facilities currently programmed for other locations but which "more appropriately should be constructed at Cam Ranh Bay."

53. (S) CM-634-65 to SecDef, 21 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65.

54. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2627 to CINCPAC, 21 May 65.

55. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 300520Z May 65, JCS IN 83302.

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Admiral Sharp then recommended: 1) approval of planning to develop the Cam Ranh Bay area as the major US port and logistics complex to support the war in RVN; 2) construction and development on an emergency basis of a jet-capable combat and logistics airfield at Cam Ranh Bay; 3) authorization to divert to Cam Ranh Bay some of the logistics forces previously approved for Qui Nhon/Nha Trang and other areas as required; 4) immediate diversion to Cam Ranh Bay of one infantry battalion to provide security; 5) requesting the GVN for approval of the logistics complex and for clearance of the necessary US combat forces.⁵⁶

On 8 June 1965 the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that the Secretary of Defense had approved all of the recommendations he had made with reference to development of Cam Ranh Bay. The necessary clearances had been obtained from the GVN. They did not believe that any additional authorizations were needed to move approved units from one location in RVN to another. However, they did need a revised troop list as soon as possible. They asked that the base development outline plan for Cam Ranh Bay be furnished them not later than 15 June in order to make maximum use of FY 1965 fiscal resources.⁵⁷

The Secretary of Defense informed General Wheeler on 9 June that he was anxious to proceed as rapidly as possible with the development of the base at Cam Ranh Bay. And on the same day two battalions of combat engineers landed at Cam Ranh Bay and construction began. Within approximately 90 days, Cam Ranh Bay would be transformed from an area of sand dunes and sparse vegetation to a major port/logistical complex with a continued high rate of construction planned for 1966.⁵⁸

56. Ibid.

57. (S) GP 3) Msg, JCS 3545 to CINCPAC, 8 Jun-65.

58. (S) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, no subj, 9 Jun-65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Jun 65. (S) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 108; (~~TS~~ ~~NOFORN~~-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, p. 533.

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Chapter 22

GROWTH OF FORCES IN RVN TO END OF 1965

The US buildup and concurrent expansion of operations in Vietnam did not cause NVN to scale down support of the insurgency. On the contrary, NVN responded to US actions by increasing its infiltration of forces and supplies into the RVN, and it soon became apparent that further US force increases would be required.

On 7 June, General Westmoreland notified Washington that regular NVN Army (PAVN) forces had entered the RVN and he believed more were on the way. Intelligence reports had located elements of the 325th PAVN division in the northern zone of II CTZ and it appeared that the major portion, if not all, of the division was in the vicinity of Kontum and Pleiku. General Westmoreland reported that the VC had begun determined and large-scale demonstrations of strength in the same general area, suggesting the beginning of a summer campaign to destroy GVN forces and isolate towns. General Westmoreland also stated that the main VC force units had shown improved training and discipline and a much improved firepower, resulting from a new family of weapons. He warned that the enemy was capable of launching regimental sized attacks in all four CTZs with little or no warning, and of being reinforced swiftly from NVN.¹

While the VC strength had increased, said COMUSMACV, the readiness of the ARVN had deteriorated. Desertion rates and battle losses were up and morale was down. General Westmoreland thought that the ARVN troops were beginning to show "signs of reluctance" to assume the offensive and in some cases their steadfastness under fire was questionable. The ARVN force buildup in the II CTZ had not materialized, and he saw no hope of the force ratio changing in ARVN favor.²

The only remedy to this deteriorating situation, said General Westmoreland, was the rapid movement of additional US or third country forces to South Vietnam. He called for specific

1. (48-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC and JCS, 070335Z Jun 65, JCS IN 92244.

2. Ibid.

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deployments, including the remainder of the III MAF, a US Army airmobile division, a ROK RCT to be followed by the balance of a ROK division, additional tactical fighter squadrons, and appropriate logistic support units for these forces. COMUSMACV also recommended preparation of studies and plans for even larger deployments "if and when required."³

Admiral Sharp, Ambassador Taylor, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff all agreed with COMUSMACV on the need for a further substantial buildup of US and allied forces in the RVN. In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 11 June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a program for additional deployments. Secretary McNamara approved the program, with some modifications, on 17 June. The approved program raised US forces from the previously authorized 69,593 to approximately 117,000 with the majority of the troops scheduled to arrive in South Vietnam in the next several months. This program would add seven US maneuver battalions, bringing the total to 22. The program also provided for an increase of 1,250 men in allied forces, bringing the total to 19,750 by 1 November 1965.⁴

Neither the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington nor COMUSMACV and CINCPAC in the field believed that the newly approved deployment program would be sufficient. General Westmoreland advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the latter part of June that his recommendations of 7 June were measures needed merely to stabilize the situation and that to carry the war to the enemy a substantial increase in ground and air forces would be required. He pointed out that the struggle had become a war of attrition. Short of a decision to introduce nuclear weapons, General Westmoreland saw no likelihood of achieving "a quick, favorable end to the war." He believed it was time for the United States to face up to the fact that it was in for a long war and one that would involve increasing numbers of US troops.⁵

Admiral Sharp supported COMUSMACV's call for additional forces. He stated that a total of 34 US and nine third country maneuver battalions was required.⁶

3. Ibid.

4. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 072325Z Jun 65, JCS IN 93177. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-457-65 to SecDef, 11 Jun 65 (derived from JCS 2343/602); (TS-GP 4) JCS 2343/602-1, 17 Jun 65; JMF 9155.3 (7 Jun 65).

5. (TS) Msgs, COMUSMACV 3240 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 24 Jun 65; COMUSMACV 3237 to CINCPAC, 24 Jun 65; OJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 65.

6. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 250542Z Jun 65, same file.

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After studying the detailed force requirement recommendations of COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 2 July 1965 to approve an additional deployment program "to insure that the VC/DRV cannot win in South Vietnam at their present level of commitment." The program called for the deployment of the Air Mobile Division, the remainder of the 1st Infantry Division (one brigade of the division was already approved for Qui Nhon), one MAB, a Marine Fighter Attack Squadron, and necessary support forces numbering 8,000 men. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also recommended additional movements to the RVN: three artillery battalions, three HAWK battalions, four additional attack squadrons, various helicopter units, a field force headquarters, and additional logistic support. In all, total US forces in the RVN would amount to approximately 175,000 men, including 34 maneuver battalions. The program repeated the requirement for 19,750 allied troops, including a ROK division of six maneuver battalions and four other third country maneuver battalions.⁷

Secretary McNamara, who was planning a trip to the RVN later in July, decided to defer action on this new program until he had a chance to discuss the situation with General Westmoreland and Ambassador Taylor. Before leaving for Saigon, he laid down a schedule and guidance "leading toward" a national decision on additional deployments. The schedule provided that, following the Secretary of Defense's return, there would be discussions with the State Department and White House during the period 22-26 July with a Presidential decision tentatively set for 26 July. The Secretary of Defense stated that the rationale for force increases remained "what it has been under three Presidents: To provide whatever support is necessary to assist South Vietnam in preserving its freedom." He directed that there would be no net reduction in personnel or equipment deployed in Europe and that the possibility of a Presidential declaration of emergency should be avoided in favor of Congressional action similar to that taken in the Berlin crisis of 1961.⁸

The Combat Picture - The CTZs

The more direct efforts made by the United States had not, by mid-July, prevented the combat situation from

7. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-515-65 to SecDef, 2 Jul 65 (derived from JCS 2343/602-3), JMF 9155.3 (7 Jun 65) sec 2.

8. (TS) Memo for Record, SecDef Meeting, 9 Jul 65, "Build-up to Meet Vietnam Situation," OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 65.

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deteriorating on the ground in RVN. In all of the four Corps Tactical Zones (CTZ) the VC, now augmented by regular NVA units, held the initiative, with the most serious threat obtaining in the two northern CTZs. Even after the arrival of the first US troops, the VC continued to expand their control over rural areas and succeeded in isolating provincial and district towns from the bulk of the rural population, thus facilitating recruitment through persuasion or coercion. Their apparent willingness to accept large casualties in offensives (the 1965 rate was exceeding that of 1964) indicated an adequate reserve of manpower. Moreover, the number of organized units and the overall estimated strength of the VC had continued to increase. The gain had come in part from infiltration from NVN. Local recruitment remained the main source of VC manpower, however.

Since the first of the year, in the I CTZ the intensity and number of VC-initiated actions had risen sharply, mainly along the coastal lowlands. The enemy had cut almost all the transportation routes in the area. Even coastal Route 1, the principal north-south highway, was impassable through much of the CTZ. The railroad was operable only between Hue and Da Nang. Government control was limited to major cities. VC attacks in II CTZ against district towns in the Kontum Province had forced the GVN to abandon several districts. Even Kontum City had been mortared. The VC campaign in the highlands was obviously gaining momentum, with Pleiku and Phu Bon Provinces little better off than Kontum. All roads and rail lines within the II CTZ were either cut or under effective interdiction. All major routes leading into II CTZ had been cut, effectively isolating several major towns. The only means of resupply into the high plateau was by air lift. GVN convoys had been repeatedly ambushed throughout II CTZ. As a result, ARVN commanders had more and more gone on the defensive, leaving the initiative to the VC. The GVN controlled only a small part of the population, concentrated largely along the coast.

Further south, in III CTZ, the VC had recently launched several regimental attacks. They were active throughout the Corps area, but particularly on the edges of the Hop Tac zone around Saigon. The VC objective of destroying the ARVN was being sought by capturing important towns and then ambushing reaction forces. Again, all major routes had been cut and most of the minor ones leading from Saigon were under almost continual harassment. The GVN currently controlled only small areas of the III CTZ and these were in the Hop Tac zone.

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The only area that had remained relatively stable during the first half of the year was IV CTZ, the Mekong Delta. The VC were applying just enough pressure there to tie down three ARVN divisions. In all of the Corps areas the VC clearly retained the capability to conduct multibattalion size military operations whenever they wished.

In April, intelligence information had confirmed the presence in the RVN of a regiment of the NVA 325th Division, believed to have moved into the country during December and January. Some reports indicated that two other regiments of the division were also in RVN but this had not been confirmed by July. US officials believed that Hanoi had sent NVA units into RVN to assist the VC in increasing the tempo of its campaign and to hasten a victory. The enemy's current strategy tended to confirm this. The VC were employing widespread harassment and terrorism, punctuated with occasional multibattalion or larger "spectaculars" when the circumstances seemed right. An appraisal of enemy strength furnished to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 14 July stated that the enemy had 10 regional headquarters, 65 battalions (about 400 men each), 188 companies, and 144 platoons with a total strength of 48,550. The regiment of the NVA was included in this total. In addition, 17,600 personnel were believed engaged in combat support operations. US intelligence estimates showed that the enemy had increased his strength in organized combat units over 50 percent since mid-1964. There was little reason to doubt that the enemy intended to continue his buildup at the same or an even higher rate unless he was stopped.⁹

A New Ambassador Is Appointed

On 8 July 1965 President Johnson announced that he had accepted the resignation of Ambassador Taylor and nominated former Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge to replace him. In his letter of resignation, Ambassador Taylor recalled that he had originally accepted the Ambassadorship with the understanding that he would hold it only one year. Widespread reports that his resignation was due to differences over national policy were described by President Johnson as "irresponsible and untrue."¹

9. (S) Ad Hoc Study Group, Rpt, "Intensification of the Military Operations In Vietnam-Concept and Appraisal," 14 Jul 65, OJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 65.

10. Keessing's Contemporary Archives, 1966, p. 21351.

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The Ambassador-designate, who was not to take over from Taylor until 20 August, accompanied the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on their visit to the RVN in mid-July.

COMUSMACV Calls for More Troops

General Westmoreland told the visiting officials that the RVNAF had lost the initiative and that the South Vietnamese people were displaying a loss of confidence in the GVN because of the increasing inability of the RVNAF to secure and hold critical rural areas and LOCs. The only way to arrest this unfavorable trend, General Westmoreland said, was to greatly increase US and FVMAF troop strength.¹¹

COMUSMACV cast his force requirements in a two-phased plan that had Ambassador Taylor's approval. Phase I included the forces needed to "stem the tide," i.e., halt the VC offensive, and would cover the remainder of 1965. Phase II represented the forces to "turn the tide" or to make sufficient viable progress in high priority areas to convince the VC that they could not win. Phase II forces would be deployed during the first half of 1966. Phase I ground force requirements included 44 maneuver battalions, 26 combat support battalions (22 artillery and four air defense), 13 engineer battalions, 20 US Army helicopter companies, seven USMC helicopter squadrons, and three US Army helicopter battalions and service units, totalling 154,662 men. Phase I requirements also included 4,000 naval personnel and 26 Air Force squadrons of various types totalling 17,500 men. Total Phase I requirements would be 176,162. Phase II would include 24 maneuver battalions, 17 combat support battalions, various helicopter units, and nine USAF squadrons, totalling an additional 94,810 men. The grand total for both Phase I and II amounted to 270,972, nearly four times the approximately 70,000 US forces in the RVN at that time.¹²

General Westmoreland warned his visitors that without these additional forces the VC would gain a more favorable strength

11. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 41-42.

12. Ibid. (TS-GP 4) "Questions by the Secretary of Defense and Replies by the US Ambassador to South Vietnam (U)," 22 Jul 65, JMF 9155.3 (22 Jul 65).

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ratio, the stability of the GVN would be weakened further, and there would soon exist a requirement for even greater US resources on a more urgent basis and against greater odds.¹³

The Secretary of Defense returned to Washington convinced that a significant troop increase in the RVN was required, and later in July he recommended a force increase to the President. The program approved by the President more than met COMUSMACV's Phase I requirements. It provided for a total of approximately 186,700 US troops in the RVN by the end of 1965, including 34 maneuver battalions and 24 combat support battalions. This July Presidential program fell far short, however, in meeting COMUSMACV's Phase II requirements. It provided for an addition of only 3,000 troops during the first half of 1966, approximately 81,000 spaces short of the 270,000 figure requested by General Westmoreland.¹⁴

The President had already attempted to prepare the public for a substantial increase of US forces in the RVN. At a 9 July news conference, he had stated that manpower needs in the RVN were increasing and would continue to do so. He had added that whatever was required would be supplied. On 28 July he announced his decision. He explained that the large increase in US forces was necessary to meet the continuing rise in the enemy's strength. The President said that, in response to General Westmoreland's request, he had ordered to the RVN the Air Mobile Division and certain other forces, raising the US fighting force from 75,000 to 125,000 "almost immediately." While not giving figures for the remainder of the increase he did say that additional forces would be needed and would be sent at a later time. The President also stated that the Reserves would not be called into service at this time, but added that, if later developments required such action, he would make the decision only after careful thought and adequate warning.¹⁵

The President's July program marked another turning point in the war. The United States had decided to increase its already substantial forces in Vietnam to the extent necessary to match the buildup in enemy forces. This decision began a trend that was to require a steady expansion of US forces to balance an equally steady expansion of enemy strength.

13. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 42.

14. For the approved July program see (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to Pres, "Recommended FY 1966 Southeast Asia Supplemental Appropriation (U)," 11 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2458/42-12, 16 Dec 65, JMF 7000 (24 Nov 65) sec 2.

15. Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965, II (1966), p. 725 and p. 795.

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In the following months deployments to the RVN proceeded within the authorized figures. In view of the great work load generated by the deployments, the Secretary of Defense had already made it known to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that deployment of individual units, as long as they were within approved authorizations, would not require his approval.¹⁶

The story of US force deployment planning throughout the remainder of 1965 and into 1966 was one of continuous refinement and adjustment upwards to meet new and changing conditions of the war. Scarcely had the Secretary of Defense departed from Saigon when COMUSMACV found it necessary to adjust his requirements. Consequently, on 30 July 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented to the Secretary of Defense a revised deployment program adding approximately 20,000 troops to Phase I and 10,000 to Phase II, raising total figures to 195,887 for Phase I and 300,599 for Phase II. (On 4 August the Joint Chiefs of Staff reduced these figures to 195,378 and 300,090.) Since the Joint Chiefs of Staff anticipated further adjustments in this program, they told the Secretary of Defense that they would comment further, including specific recommendations regarding Phase II deployments, as refinements were made.¹⁷

In an attempt to establish a more orderly procedure for these refinements, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed a deployment planning conference to coordinate and complete, insofar as possible, all matters relating to Phase I deployments. This conference met at Headquarters, Pacific Command, from 3 through 6 August 1965 and included representatives of the Joint Staff, the Military Services, OASD (I&L), CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, and COMUSKOREA. This conference produced a refined program for Phase I deployments to RVN and other WESTPAC and Southeast Asia bases, which the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Secretary of Defense on 23 August. This program still provided for 34 maneuver battalions for the RVN, but raised the total number of required personnel to 210,000. The program also called for approximately 41,000 US troops in other Pacific and Southeast Asia areas outside of the RVN, including three maneuver battalions in the Japan-Okinawa area.¹⁸

16. (TS) Memo for Record, JCS Meeting, 21 Jul 65, JMF 9155.3, 1965.

17. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-590-65 to SecDef, 30 Jul 65 (derived from JCS 2343/602-6); SM-729-65 to SecDef, 5 Aug 65; JMF 9155.3 (7 Jun 65) sec 2.

18. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-643-65 to SecDef, 23 Aug 65 (derived from JCS 2343/655-2), JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65) sec 2.

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On 1 September, the Secretary of Defense requested the President to approve an additional increment of forces for the RVN, raising the total figure to 210,000. The Secretary of Defense subsequently explained to the President that the increase was attributable to the need for additional in-country airlift, artillery and air defense support for combat operations, strike aircraft and associated support, and air base construction. There is no evidence in the record to indicate that overall approval for the entire 210,000 program, as submitted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 23 August, was ever given, but the Secretary of Defense did authorize, on an individual basis, the movement of specific units within that program.¹⁹

The August planning conference and the resulting refined program did not resolve Phase I requirements, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff found it necessary in late September to convene another deployment planning conference to amend the Phase I program in the light of recommended additions and deletions. The participants of the August conference again met in Honolulu during the period 27 September through 1 October and produced another refined program for Phase I deployments. This program was merely an updating of the August program, reflecting 9,089 add-on spaces in the RVN, bringing the total Phase I figure to 219,619, and 3,445 add-on spaces for other areas in WESTPAC and Southeast Asia. Phase I deployments as now scheduled would not be completed until April 1966. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved this refined program on 22 October and directed the Services to prepare to satisfy the requirements for Phase I add-on deployments. Forwarding this refined program to the Secretary of Defense on 23 October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff explained that the add-ons were needed to strengthen the Phase I force structure and to provide the essential combat and combat service support, the necessary command and control elements, and the required increase to offshore base capability to support adequately the combat operations in RVN.²⁰

19. (PS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to Pres, 1 Sep 65, Encl to JCS 2343/655-5, 2 Sep 65; (PS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to Pres, 22 Sep 65, Encl to JCS 2343/655-1, 23 Sep 65; JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65) sec 2. For examples of SecDef approval of individual units within the 23 Aug 65 program see (PS-GP 4) Memos, DepSecDef to CJCS, 29 and 30 Sep 65, Encls to JCS 2343/655-10 and -11, 29 Sep and 1 Oct 65, same file.

20. (PS-GP 4) JCSM-779-65 to SecDef, 23 Oct 65 (derived from JCS 2343/655-17), same file, secs 3 and 4.

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On 10 November 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense with their recommendations for Phase II operations and deployments. To accomplish the Phase II objective, "to start winning the war," the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented a concept of operations calling for US and allied forces to continue the establishment and expansion of secure bases and key LOCs in the coastal area and elsewhere as necessary. From these and other bases, US and allied forces would launch stepped-up offensive operations to assist the GVN in expanding its control over the militarily and economically important areas of Saigon, the Mekong Delta, the coastal plain, and the central highlands. The concept also provided for intensified air operations against NVN, including attacks on POL and electric power installation targets, and continued assistance to friendly forces in Laos.

Additional forces would be required to achieve these tasks, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended a Phase II deployment of approximately 113,000 men (28 maneuver battalions and supporting units). Added to their final Phase I deployment recommendation of 219,600, total deployment requirements for the RVN now amounted to approximately 333,000. The Phase II program included two Army Infantry divisions (the 25th and the 4th), the remainder of the 1st Marine Division, and an armored cavalry regiment plus four tactical fighter squadrons. The program also included 27,000 men for use outside the RVN. In order to meet the deployment dates desired by CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended the call-up of selected reserve units and individuals, the activation of new units, and the extension of terms of service.²¹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also reviewed the impact of both Phase I and II deployments on US strategic military posture world-wide. They had already warned the Secretary of Defense on 24 September that planned deployments to Southeast Asia were endangering the US strategic military posture in other parts of the world. They had also pointed out that increases in force levels were required to 1) meet the operational requirements of the Vietnam war as well as to maintain forward deployments in Europe and the Western Pacific; 2) supply an adequate training and rotation base to support US military operations and forces in Southeast Asia and world-wide; and 3) provide a military

21. (S-GP 3) JCSM-811-65 to SecDef, 10 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2343/655-26), same file, sec 6.

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capability to conduct other contingency operations. They informed the Secretary of Defense now that either completion of Phase I deployments alone or the completion of Phase I and the implementation of Phase II would reduce US strategic posture to a degree where, unless reconstituted on a timely basis, it could not support operations in Southeast Asia and other worldwide commitments. To correct this situation, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested authority to acquire, equip, and support seven Army aviation units, one CVS, four tactical fighter squadrons and three tactical reconnaissance squadrons, and one Marine expeditionary brigade. If Phase II deployments were approved, they requested similar authority for two infantry divisions, 18 additional Army aviation units, four tactical fighter squadrons, and 6/9 MEF (-). They also requested authority for selective reserve call-ups to provide essential forces that could not be obtained on a timely basis through other means.²²

The JCS submission of Phase II requirements elicited no immediate response from the Secretary of Defense. He had scheduled another trip to the RVN in late November, and planned to review force requirements with General Westmoreland at that time. Although the Secretary of Defense did not give blanket approval to either of the refined Phase I programs or the Phase II requirements, he continued to approve the movement of separate units within the Phase I program on an individual basis. As a result, by 15 November, total authorization for US forces in the RVN stood at 188,930, and by the end of 1965 it had risen to 206,220.²³

During the Secretary of Defense's 28-29 November Saigon visit, General Westmoreland informed him that the North Vietnamese were increasing their forces in the RVN at a rate more than double that of previous estimates. To meet this expanded threat, General Westmoreland asked for 52,000 additional US forces, designating this increase Phase IIA forces. On his departure from the RVN, Mr. McNamara stated that the acceleration

22. (S-GP 3) JCSM-721-65 to SecDef, 24 Sep 65 (derived from JCS 2343/640-1), JMF 9155.3 (23 Jul 65). (S-GP 3) JCSM-814-65 to SecDef, 10 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2343/640-2), same file, sec 2.

23. (S-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 15 Nov 65, Encl to JCS 2343/655-30, 17 Nov 65, JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65) sec 6.
(S-GP 3) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 24 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2343/655-44, same file.

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of NVA infiltration required US and RVN counteraction. Upon his return, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were directed to convene a planning conference to develop a program of deployment schedules for Phase II and IIA forces, including appropriate support forces.²⁴

In connection with a supplemental appropriation request for FY 1966 to support the expanded US military effort in Southeast Asia, the Secretary of Defense requested the President on 11 December to approve for planning purposes a program of deployments and augmentation modifying the July Presidential program. On 13 December the Deputy Secretary of Defense authorized the Joint Chiefs of Staff to use this program for planning purposes. The program did not break deployments down in terms of phases, but rather provided strength in six-month increments. It still called for 34 US maneuver battalions in the RVN by the end of 1965, but raised the total US force figure from the 186,700 of the July program to 194,900. The new program provided for 277,100 US troops and 46 maneuver battalions by June 1966. By December 1966 these figures would rise to 367,500 troops and 75 maneuver battalions. US combat support battalions would be increased to 38 by mid-1966 and to 59 by the end of that year. The new program projected the number of "attack capable" aircraft in RVN by the end of 1966 at 929, approximately 150 more than the July program.²⁵

While deployment planning was undergoing constant revision and refinement in the latter half of 1965, actual troop movements to South Vietnam continued unabated. The 1st Cavalry Division (Air Mobile) arrived during September and the 1st Infantry Division closed in October, completing the deployment of major combat units in 1965. This raised the total US forces in the RVN at the end of October to 153,505.

The deployment of the 1st Cavalry Division (AM) is illustrative of many of the actions involved in sending a major Army unit to Vietnam. On 15 June the Secretary of Defense authorized the Army to activate the division by reorganizing the 11th Air Assault Division and applying other assets. Additional equipment procurements in excess of \$28 million were needed to completely outfit the new division. On the same day that the

24. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 44. NY Times, 29 Nov 65, 1. (TS-GP 3) Memo, ASD (M) to JCS et al., 1 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2343/724, 1 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65).

25. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to Pres, 11 Dec 65; Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS et al., 13 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2458/42-12, 16 Dec 65; JMF 7000 (24 Nov 64) sec 2.

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President authorized deployment, 28 July, the 1st Cavalry Division (AM) began its overseas movement, with six passenger vessels, 11 cargo ships and four aircraft carriers being used to move men and equipment. The division disembarked over the beach at Qui Nhon, with cargo lightered ashore from two to five miles at sea. The actual debarkation of the division and the 40 mile move inland to the division's base at An Khe took only 15 days. A total of 15,000 men, 3,100 vehicles, 470 aircraft and 19,000 tons of cargo were involved in the movement. Bad weather and VC attacks on access roads near An Khe hampered the movement somewhat. On 18 September, only 95 days after the reorganization of the division had been approved, the first elements of the division were engaged in combat with the VC.

By 31 December 1965, the addition of assorted support units increased the total strength of US forces in Vietnam to 184,314. During the nine month period from March through December, the United States had deployed approximately 150,000 troops to South Vietnam. This tremendous buildup had not been achieved without cost to US military posture in other parts of the world. NATO reinforcements had been drawn down to a point where flexibility was impaired by a lack of readily deployable general purpose forces; there were substantial inadequacies in the US training and rotation base; and there were short-falls and draw-downs in supply stock, and equipment that left some forces in the RVN and elsewhere with less than the required rates of supply support.²⁶

Command Arrangements

In his recommendations to the Joint Chiefs of Staff following the deployment conference of 8-10 April, Admiral Sharp had set forth his views on the optimum national command arrangements for operations in Vietnam. The organizational integrity of the Service components would be retained to the extent possible, and military command would remain in Service channels. Administrative and logistic support of all units would be in accordance with established procedures. CINCPAC was to have overall operational control of all land, sea and air forces and would exercise this through his major subordinate

26. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 44, 259. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 255-65 (Supp.), 1 Nov 65, p. 8 (TS) Talking Paper for CJCS, "Draft Memorandum for the President on Recommended FY 1966 Southeast Asia Supplemental Appropriation (U)," 9 Dec 65, JML 7000 (24 Nov 65) sec 2. (S NOFORN-GP 1) CSA Report, 1968, pp. 27-28.

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commanders, CINCUSARPAC, CINCPACFLT, CINCPACAF and COMUSMACV. COMUSMACV was designated the operational joint commander for operations in the RVN. As the senior US Army commander in the area, he would also have responsibility for US Army component functions. He could exercise this responsibility, if he wished, through appropriate subordinate Army commanders.²⁷

USAF functions in RVN would be controlled by the Commander, 2d Air Division, who would report in this capacity to COMUSMACV. For operations against NVN, operational control of US Air Forces in Southeast Asia would be exercised by CINCPACAF through the Commander 13th Air Force and the Commander 2d Air Division, when directed by CINCPAC. CINCPACAF would operate in support of COMUSMACV when so directed.

CG III MEF would assume command functions over the naval component command in RVN and would, in this capacity, report to COMUSMACV. Other offensive naval operations would be conducted under operational control of CINCPACFLT who would operate forces in support of COMUSMACV when directed.²⁸

Following clearance for entry of the MEB into RVN, General Westmoreland furnished CINCPAC his concept of the command relationships for Marines and the concept for their employment in counterinsurgency operations. COMUSMACV had secured the agreement of the RVNAF High Command to an enlarged mission for the Marines, and for command relationships with the RVNAF commander in the Da Nang Area, CG I Corps. In his letter of instructions to the CG 9th MEB, COMUSMACV had instructed him, in coordination with the CG I Corps, to "continue to occupy defensive positions and key terrain at Da Nang to secure the airfield, communications facilities, US supporting installations, port facilities and landing beaches against attack. Undertake offensive action as necessary to support I Corps RVNAF in the conduct of the defense of the area of Da Nang and critical contiguous areas against VC or PAVN units."²⁹

27. (43-GP 3) CINCPAC Deployment Plan for Logistic and Combat Forces to Southeast Asia--Deployment Planning Conference, Hq, PACOM, 8-10 April 1965, 10 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 1.

28. Ibid.

29. (43-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J3 11535 to CINCPAC, 13 Apr 65, JCS IN 11504.

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General Westmoreland set no time for the beginning of Phase II "offensive action as a mobile reaction force" within a 50 mile radius of Da Nang. The same was true of Phase III, in which the Marines would take offensive action, if necessary, in the whole of the I CTZ.

Admiral Sharp, on seeing General Westmoreland's letter of instructions, advised him that he had placed too much emphasis on the defensive aspects of the Marine mission. "As I understand the JCS directive," he said, "the Marines are to engage in offensive counterinsurgency operations earliest." Westmoreland's instructions to the Marine commander indicated to Sharp that the Marines would not start offensive operations against the VC for several weeks. "If I read the messages properly, this is not what our superiors intend. Recommend you revise your concept accordingly."³⁰

Admiral Sharp apparently had interpreted the JCS directives correctly. "The Joint Chiefs of Staff agree with you that the active employment of US Marine Forces now in RVN in counterinsurgency combat operations should be accelerated in order to establish procedures and basis for similar operations," the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed Sharp upon seeing his message to General Westmoreland.³¹

Command and Control-US/RVN/Allied Forces

The decision to commit US forces in a combat role, as well as the growing enemy capabilities marked by the identification of a NVA division in RVN, intensified the need to resolve the question of how operations of the US, Allied, and RVN forces would be controlled and coordinated. General Westmoreland had, on 22 March, given his views on the broad aspects of command and control. On 7 April, General Wheeler passed on to Admiral Sharp his own views on command and coordination of US/RVN/Allied forces in the northern CTZs, I and II Corps areas, and on control of US and RVNAF aircraft both in RVN and in NVN.³²

30. (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 140831Z Apr 65, JCS IN 14777.

31. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9063 to CINCPAC, 14 Apr 65.

32. (TS) Msgs, COMUSMACV MAC 1566 to CINCPAC, 22 Mar 65; JCS 1223-65 to CINCPAC, 7 Apr 65; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 65.

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The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, did not believe that coordination/cooperation could be handled from Saigon. COMUSMACV and his staff were already overextended trying to handle responsibilities in RVN and in NVN. He warned that, even if three divisions, US and Allied, were in position in the I and II CTZs, no adequate system existed to direct their operations effectively in the event of a major attack by the NVA in those areas. The ARVN I and II Corps headquarters were static territorial headquarters, not mobile tactical headquarters such as would be needed. As one solution General Wheeler suggested that General Westmoreland might establish in the Pleiku area a combined field force headquarters, perhaps headed by General Throckmorton, which would include both US and RVN staff officers. This headquarters would, in effect, be a corps headquarters, although not so named, and would have a broad mission, including coordination of US/Allied/ARVN operations in the north and the preparation of plans to counter any NVA attack. In this connection General Wheeler expressed concern at General Westmoreland's reports of the VC buildup in the northern provinces, at the movement of the 325th NVA Division headquarters into RVN, and at ominous signs of enemy preparations near Kontum and west of Da Nang. The Chairman informed Admiral Sharp that the Secretary of Defense shared this concern and that was one reason why he was so anxious to push ahead rapidly with creating logistic facilities to support the introduction of additional forces.³³

The CINCPAC plan developed at Honolulu on 8-10 April reflected most of General Wheeler's ideas for command and control of the US/RVN/Allied forces when operating in the same areas. A US Army Corps Headquarters would be established upon deployment of the remainder of the MEF and an additional US division. The CG, US Army Corps, would report to COMUSMACV, assuming operational control of the US divisions and, if deployed, of the ROK division. (If establishment of the corps headquarters were delayed, COMUSMACV would retain direct operational control.) COMUSMACV would plan and conduct operations on a "coordinate/cooperative" basis with CINCRVNAF. During these operations he would exercise operational control of US and allied troops, while the US corps commander and the division commanders would ensure coordination with the commanders of ARVN units in and adjacent to their operating areas. COMUSMACV and CINCRVNAF would form a small combined staff to correlate activities and perform liaison at their levels of command on these combat operations in which forces under COMUSMACV and CINCRVNAF would participate. This staff would serve both major commanders, who

33. Ibid.

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would supervise its activities and approve or disapprove its actions. Directive powers and command authority in matters acted upon by this combined staff would be vested solely in COMUSMACV and CINCRVNAF respectively. Directives to their respective subordinate forces would be sent only through their national operational control channels. Subordinate commanders in the COMUSMACV chain of operational control would accomplish coordination with ARVN commanders at their levels of command in accordance with these principles and procedures.³⁴

On 11 April General Westmoreland again raised the question of command and control over US/Allied/GVN forces. Addressing the problems which would be raised by the arrival of three division forces, he strongly recommended a Corps Headquarters be furnished him, suggesting that HQ III US Corps be considered for deployment to RVN concurrently with the second of the divisions. The HQ III Corps would not need to be at full TO&E strength but could be tailored to its mission, with COMUSMACV's own headquarters furnishing the manning necessary for a provisional field headquarters for a temporary period.³⁵

"In order to forestall certain political and psychological problems within South Vietnam and the world at large associated with the deployment of US combat forces, the formation in due course, on a test basis of an International Military Security Task Force (IMSTAF) in the Da Nang area built around the 9th MEB is recommended," General Westmoreland said. He was not proposing that the direct chain of command of US military units be confused or complicated by intricate international machinery. Rather, he wanted third country forces, Korean, Australian, New Zealand and Filipino, along with RVN units, to be attached to the US brigade to make up a combined force. If larger deployments occurred the IMSTAF could phase into a larger international force. If the IMSTAF at Da Nang proved successful it would be possible to form a similar IMSTAF at Bien Hoa as well.

He believed that the time was ripe to form "a mechanism at the national level to control international forces." His concept involved the joint exercise of authority by CINCRVNAF and COMUSMACV, the formation of a small single combined staff headed by a US general officer, a Vietnamese Deputy Chief of the Combined Staff, and a multinational staff. This staff would, subject to the approval of the combined commanders,

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34. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC Deployment Plan for Logistic and Combat Forces to Southeast Asia-Deployment Planning Conference HQ PACOM, 8-10 April 1965, 10 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (5 Apr 65) sec 1
35. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC J3 11682 to CINCPAC, 11 Apr 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 65.

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develop strategic guidance, rules of engagement, command relations and such other matters as might be directed. Informally, RVNAF officials had indicated that they would go along with such an arrangement. "However," he concluded, "it should be introduced on a low-key basis."³⁶

The wisdom of not publicizing plans for forming a joint command was confirmed later in the month when General Ky expressed publicly the view that a joint command was not necessary. On 3 May, in commenting on Ky's attitude, Ambassador Taylor warned Washington that Hanoi had called reports that the United States and the GVN were planning a joint command proof that the RVN was a "lackey" of US imperialism.³⁷

One of the principal objectives of General Wheeler's visit to Honolulu on 19-20 April was to discuss and make firm arrangements for optimum command arrangements in Southeast Asia. He informed Admiral Sharp of this on 16 April and told him that he saw three military situations for which advance agreement on arrangements must be reached. The first was the present situation wherein US and allied combat forces were being sent into RVN to conduct counterinsurgency operations against the VC. The second, was a "near-term" contingency wherein troops from NVN either overtly or covertly entered the RVN on the side of the VC, perhaps in an effort to cut the country in two. The most drastic situation would, of course, be one in which Chinese Communist forces would intervene in great numbers on a broad front in RVN and perhaps in Thailand and Burma. "I desire on the first day of the conference," the Chairman informed CINCPAC, "to finalize our thoughts and establish an agreed organizational pattern toward which we can build in the coming months." He believed that sending a US Corps headquarters with signal and supporting units to RVN as a base for establishing a combined field force command in the northern war zone should be seriously considered.³⁸

General Westmoreland sent to Admiral Sharp on 8 May the general concept for command and control of US/Allied ground combat forces that had developed at the Honolulu Conference on 19-20 April. The assumptions were that national forces would retain their command identity. The United States would not place its forces under the operational control of RVNAF or

36. Ibid.

37. (S) Msg, Saigon 3622 to State, 3 May 65; JCS IN 41715.

38. (S-GP 1) Msg, JCS 9222 to CINCPAC, 16 Apr 65.

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allied commanders (except temporarily in emergency), but the United States might in special cases assume operational control or temporary "tactical direction" over the forces of the RVNAF. The United States would assume operational control over allied forces usually at brigade or higher level.

His concepts for the IMSTAF, earlier recommended, were that allied forces would normally be brigaded with US forces under a US commander with a combined staff. The nucleus of the IMSTAF would be a US brigade with some allied representation on the staff. An IMSTAF would have complete tactical integrity and would be employed in a manner similar to a US brigade. Any ARVN unit associated with the IMSTAF would be under operational control of the US commander.³⁹

On 10 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that a combined field force headquarters be organized under the Deputy COMUSMACV to exercise operational control over US, Allied, and assigned ARVN ground forces deployed in the northern combat zone. Operations in the southern part of RVN would continue under existing arrangements. They also noted that the small combined coordinating staff, to be headed jointly by COMUSMACV and CINCRVNAF, would suffice for the present. However, a larger, more formal combined command authority should be established when more US forces arrived. Secretary McNamara approved their recommendations and expressed agreement with their views on the same day.⁴⁰

On 14 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff notified CINCPAC of the approval of their recommendations. The Secretary, said the Joint Chiefs of Staff, approved a US deputy field force commander, authorized to take over from the field force commander in case the latter was required to move up to the position of COMUSMACV in the event General Westmoreland assumed command of United States Forces, Southeast Asia (USFSEASIA), or of the Central Region, SEATO Field Forces (COMCRSFF). The Field Force headquarters would be established under the present Deputy COMUSMACV, General Throckmorton, at such a time as the US IX Corps Headquarters was deployed to RVN. There would be no requirement

39. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 080700Z May 65, JCS IN 50558.

40. (S-GP 4) JCSM-345-65 to SecDef, 10 May 65 (derived from JCS 2343/550-2); (S) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 10 May 65; JCS 2343/550-3; JMF 9155.3 (24 Mar 65).

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for an additional officer to be assigned as Deputy COMUSMACV when and if, as was contemplated, General Throckmorton assumed command of Headquarters, Field Forces, South Vietnam.⁴¹

Secretary McNamara had also approved upgrading the "two-hatted" position of Deputy COMUSMACV for Air Operations and Commander, 2d Air Division, to Lieutenant General. A USAF Major General would be named Deputy Commander, 2d Air Division, with additional Air Force general officers as appropriate. "Recognizing the supervisory problems generated by the geographic separation of air units functioning under the operational control and/or coordinating authority of the Commander, 2d Air Division, an appropriate number of wing organizations should be established under his cognizance." The Deputy Chief of Staff, Headquarters, MACV, would be a USAF Brigadier General. "In view of the heavily increased air activity in Southeast Asia," the Joint Chiefs of Staff continued, "and the probability of additional commitment of US air forces, additional key staff billets should be identified and subsequently filled by air officers."

CINCPAC was told to plan for this and additionally to plan for a combined field force headquarters in the I CTZ.⁴²

Admiral Sharp asked General Westmoreland on 22 May to submit to him plans for: 1) the establishment of a small, combined coordinating staff under COMUSMACV/CINCRVNAF; 2) a more formal combined authority; and 3) activation of a field force headquarters in the northern combat zone in either a combined or unilateral US situation.⁴³

General Westmoreland had earlier discussed with top RVNAF officials the matter of setting up a combined command authority of some type and had found them receptive because of the obvious military advantages. Subsequently, however, RVN military leaders had gradually cooled toward the idea of a "combined" headquarters. On 24 May, COMUSMACV cited to CINCPAC the several statements by Ky and General Thieu on the undesirability of joint command. "In the light of these attitudes," he told Admiral Sharp, "it is clearly premature at this time to propose the establishment of a combined coordinating staff to the GVN."⁴⁴

41. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2159 to CINCPAC, 14 May 65.

42. Ibid.

43. (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 220400Z May 65, JCS IN 72070.

44. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 17292 to CINCPAC, 24 May 65, JCS IN 73940.

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As a stop-gap measure, General Westmoreland had appointed and accredited one of his general officers as a representative on the RVNAF Joint General Staff to "coordinate the overall MACV advisory effort vis-a-vis the Joint General Staff, in critical cases affecting several functional areas." Because of General Westmoreland's statement that a combined command authority would not be feasible politically at this time, Admiral Sharp recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the activation of a combined US/GVN coordinating staff be deferred indefinitely.⁴⁵

Subsequently, on 28 May, CINCPAC was directed, in a joint State/Defense message, to plan for the combined Field Force headquarters "on a unilateral basis." He had already instructed COMUSMACV to plan in detail for the activation of a Field Force Headquarters in the northern combat zone in either a US unilateral or a combined basis. Admiral Sharp's view had been that a US Field Force should be built around the nucleus of a tailored US Army Corps Headquarters, to be activated when two or more US divisions had been deployed to South Vietnam. The headquarters would assume command of US Army and US Marine Corps forces in the northern combat zone. The headquarters cadre would be filled out from in-country resources as much as possible. In view of the joint nature of the ground operations and the need for close air support, Admiral Sharp had counted on not only US Army, but Marine Corps and US Air Force representation on the staff. On 16 June he informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he had learned that they had directed the Chief of Staff, Army, to plan for the organization, activation and deployment of a US Army Field Force headquarters. He immediately asked for clarification as to the relationship between what he had been directed to do on 14 May and what, apparently, the Chief of Staff, Army, had now been directed to do. "If the proposed Field Forces command is to embrace both Army and Marine Corps ground forces," CINCPAC told the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "there is a concomitant need to tailor the headquarters in such a manner as to include adequate Marine Corps representation and to provide necessary air expertise. In this case the title of the Field Force should reflect its joint composition."⁴⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that they would take his views into consideration when they addressed the subject of the Field Force Headquarters definitively. They pointed

45. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 260332Z May 65, JCS IN 76889.

46. (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 160250Z Jun 65, JCS IN 14248.

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out that they had recommended to the Secretary of Defense that one US Army Corps headquarters be deployed to RVN. Subsequently "higher authority" had directed that the Corps Headquarters be referred to as a US Army Field Force Headquarters to avoid using the term "corps headquarters". While it was true that they had asked the Department of Army to plan the organization of the US Army Field Force Headquarters, Vietnam, because of the issues now raised by CINCPAC, they believed that a joint US Field Force Headquarters in the RVN would provide for better operational control of US forces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff thereupon rescinded their instructions to the Chief of Staff, Army, and instructed Admiral Sharp to plan for a joint US Field Force Headquarters, RVN. They directed him also to continue his planning in preparation for activation of a combined field force headquarters.⁴⁷

Command Arrangements - SE Asia

The top US commander in Vietnam served not only as COMUSMACV but also as COMUSMACTHAI, commander of US forces in Thailand, an arrangement made in 1962 at the time of the temporary deployment of US forces to that country. The Thai Government had not been consulted on establishment of COMUSMACTHAI. With the withdrawal of US forces the United States did not disestablish USMACTHAI and the Thai Government did not force the issue. However, Thai officials expressed resentment over the fact that the dual command tended to make Thailand an appendage of the US command in Vietnam, bringing propaganda charges from communist nations that Thailand was a puppet of the United States.⁴⁸

In addition to these commands, General Westmoreland, senior US officer in Southeast Asia was, in emergency, to be designated Commander, US Forces Southeast Asia (COMUSSEASIA), and Commander, Central Region, SEATO Field Forces (COMCRSFF).

At the Manila Conference in late 1964 the Thai Foreign Minister had asked Secretary of State Rusk to have US command arrangements in Southeast Asia modified. The visit of a GVN delegation to Thailand in late 1964 had given rise to Chinese Communist charges that the Vietnamese were conveying to the Thai Government demands of their joint US overlords. This increased Thai irritability over US command arrangements which, in their eyes, associated Thailand directly with US military actions in RVN.

47. (23) Msg, JCS 4561 to CINCPAC, 24 Jun 65.

48. (2) Msg, Bangkok 120 to State, 2 Aug 64. (TS) Ltr, SecDef to SecState, 30 Apr 65, JMF 9150 (28 Apr 65).

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The Prime Minister of Thailand informed US Ambassador Martin that he realized that in event of a major escalation General Westmoreland would have to assume overall command in Southeast Asia. But he pointed out that things had not yet reached that stage and he was unable to understand why the United States persisted in keeping Westmoreland as COMUSMACTHAI since his duties obviously required his presence in Saigon. If the United States wished to continue maintaining USMACTHAI, his government was amenable, but definitely wanted the command separated from the Vietnam command.⁴⁹

CINCPAC had anticipated these objections in mid-1964 and had suggested that a separate COMUSMACTHAI, resident in Bangkok, be established with a Lieutenant General holding the post. At that time General Westmoreland had concurred in this recommendation. But with the upsurge in enemy activity in RVN and the consequent intensification of US actions in the entire Southeast Asian area, General Westmoreland changed his view. Because he felt that any major reorganization of the US command structure would be disruptive at this time, COMUSMACV recommended on 31 March 1965 that there be no change in command arrangements that would divide responsibility for operations in Southeast Asia. He wanted no action taken to establish a separate COMUSMACTHAI. He recommended also that the post of CHJUSMAG Thailand be retained in status quo with a USAF or USA Major General holding that post, assisted by a Brigadier General of the "opposite service" as his deputy.⁵⁰

In anticipation of Secretary Rusk's attendance at the May 1965 meeting of SEATO, Secretary McNamara asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to furnish him their views on the existing command relationships in the Southeast Asian area.⁵¹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 28 April that because of the long-standing sensitivity of the Thai Government to the "double-hat COMUSMACV/COMUSMACTHAI arrangement", and in order to promote efficiency by letting COMUSMACV concentrate on his immediate task of defeating the VC, they believed it was now time to separate MACV and MACTHAI into two separate commands. As for COMUSMACV's planning responsibilities as COMUSSEASIA (designate) and as

⁴⁹. Ibid.

⁵⁰. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 10021 to CINCPAC, 31 May 65, JCS IN 84276.

⁵¹. (TS) CM-565-65 to the JCS, 26 Apr 65; (TS) JCSM-319-65 to SecDef, 28 Apr 65; JMF 9150 (28 Apr 65).

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COMCRSFF (designate), the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that he should be in a position to exercise direct policy control over the SEASIA and SEATO planning activities of COMUSMACTHAI. Therefore a direct US channel should be kept open between COMUSMACTHAI and General Westmoreland in his roles as COMUSSEASIA and COMCRSFF. Staff support to accomplish this would require augmentation of the small COMUSMACTHAI planning group in Bangkok and development of a communications/operations facility in Korat to permit later expansion into a headquarters for COMUSSEASIA and COMCRSFF.⁵²

Third Country Forces - 1965

At the 1 April 1965 NSC meeting, where the President approved the first US combat deployments, he also directed the "urgent exploration" with the Governments of the Republic of Korea, Australia, and New Zealand of the possibility of rapid deployments of significant combat elements. In implementation of the President's directive, the United States invited Australia and New Zealand to participate in military staff talks with CINCPAC. During the talks, in early April 1965, the Australians indicated that they were prepared to send a combat battalion to Vietnam. New Zealand, on the other hand, was less receptive to US overtures for combat forces. The New Zealand representative thought that his Government might furnish a 105mm howitzer battery and, possibly, a tank troop, but he added that such a deployment would require considerable political ground work with the New Zealand public.⁵³

True to its word, Australia committed a combat battalion to the RVN. After the requisite formalities of a GVN request had been accomplished, a joint GVN-Australian communique of 29 April 1965 announced that Australia would deploy an infantry battalion to the RVN, marking the first formal commitment of a combat unit by a third country.⁵⁴

52. Ibid.

53. (S-GP 1) NSAM 328, 6 Apr 65, Encl to JCS 2343/566, 7 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (6 Apr 65). (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 130011Z Apr 65, JCS IN 15890.

54. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 300325Z Apr 65, JCS IN 37045.

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In anticipation of the arrival of the Australian troops in the RVN, the United States and Australia signed on 5 May 1965 a Military Working Arrangement. This Arrangement provided for the overall command of the Australian forces to be vested in the Commander, Australian Army Force, Republic of Vietnam (COMAAFV), who would in turn be under the operational control of COMUSMACV. The Arrangement specified that the Australian battalion would be "brigaded" with "an appropriate US brigade echelon" and stated that COMUSMACV would supply all administrative and logistical support for the Australian forces. Subsequently, in a financial working arrangement, Australia agreed to reimburse the United States for this support.⁵⁵

The advance party of the Australian battalion arrived in the RVN on 26 May 1965. The remainder of the battalion together with a logistic support company closed between 29 May and 11 June and was attached to the US 173d Airborne Brigade at Bien Hoa. (This was in accordance with a "Concept of Command and Operations" that the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, had given the Australian Military Attache in Washington, as well as the US-Australian Military Working Arrangement.) In late September, Australia augmented its force with a 105mm howitzer battery, a field engineer troop, an APC troop, a signal unit, and filler personnel. At year-end, Australian strength in the RVN stood at 1,557.⁵⁶

The US sent Ambassador-at-Large Henry Cabot Lodge to New Zealand in early May to solicit a definite commitment, and late in the month Prime Minister Holyoake announced that New Zealand would send a 105mm battery to the RVN. This deployment would be executed concurrent with the withdrawal of the New Zealand engineer team sent to the RVN in 1964.⁵⁷

Despite some unfavorable reaction to the deployment by the New Zealand public, the battery arrived in the RVN on 21 July 1965. It was placed under the operational control of the 173d Airborne Brigade with a primary mission of support for the

55. (~~SECRET~~-GP 4) Mil Working Arrangement between COMAAFV & COMUSMACV, 5 May 65; (~~SECRET~~) Financial Working Arrangement between MACV & AFV, 7 Sep 65; JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 65).

56. (~~SECRET~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 71, 359-361. (TS) Ltr, CJCS to MGEN Charles E. Long, 10 May 65, OCJCS File 091 091 Vietnam May 1965.

57. (~~SECRET~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 362. (S) Memo, COL Gibbons to Dir, J-3, "Trip Report," 6 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 1965.

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Australian battalion. This was in accordance with a Military Working Arrangement signed on 9 June 1965 by New Zealand and the United States, placing command of the New Zealand troops under the Commander, New Zealand Army Force, Republic of Vietnam (COMNZAFV), who would be under the operational control of COMUSMACV. Again, the US agreed to furnish logistical and administrative support for the New Zealand troops, and although it was never set forth in a formal agreement, New Zealand reimbursed the United States for this support.⁵⁸

The Free World nation, outside of the United States, that furnished the largest amount of military assistance to the RVN in 1965 was the Republic of Korea. In March 1965, the ROK sent to the RVN a task force composed of an army engineer battalion with associated support and self-defense troops. This task force, called the "Dove unit," totalled 1,927 men.⁵⁹

Through the early summer of 1965, the United States conducted diplomatic discussions with the ROK concerning the provision of combat elements in the RVN. These discussions culminated on 12 August when the ROK agreed to contribute a combat division composed of a headquarters, one marine regiment, two infantry regiments, and a field support command.⁶⁰

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, optimistic that the ROK would approve the deployment of this division, had already included it in the force figures given to the Secretary of Defense with their deployment recommendations of 2 July 1965.

As had been the case with both Australia and New Zealand, the United States negotiated a Military Working Arrangement with the ROK. This arrangement, signed on 6 September 1965, provided for US logistical and administrative support of the ROK troops and vested command of the ROK forces in the Commander, Republic of Korea Forces, Vietnam (COMROKRV). Unlike the arrangements with Australia and New Zealand, the US-ROK Arrangement made no provision for the operational control of COMUSMACV over the Korean commander. Throughout the fall, COMUSMACV attempted, without success, to reach a formal agreement with COMROKRV on command and control. He reported to CINCPAC in early December that a formal arrangement could be politically embarrassing to the ROKs, since it might

58. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 72, 362.
(S-NOFORN-GP 4) Military Working Agreement between COMNZAFV & COMUSMACV, 9 Jun 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 65).

59. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 363.

60. Ibid, p. 364.

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connote that they were subordinate to, and acting as mercenaries for, the United States. General Westmoreland felt a formal arrangement was no longer necessary since COMROKRV had agreed verbally to de facto operational control by US commanders.⁶¹

The advance party of the ROK division arrived in Saigon on 15 September 1965. The main body of the division landed on 8 October and the deployment was completed on 8 November, bringing the total ROK forces in the RVN to 20,620. The ROK division was stationed in II CTZ, the Marine regiment at Cam Ranh Bay and the rest of the division at Qui Nhon, with a mission of protecting logistic bases and keeping vital Route 19 open to traffic.⁶²

Two other Free World nations, the Philippines and the Republic of China, increased their military assistance to the RVN, but this aid continued to be in the form of noncombatant personnel. The United States attempted to persuade the Philippines to supplement its representation in South Vietnam with a civic action group of about 2,000 men. Both President Macapagal and President-elect Marcos favored this proposal, but the Philippine Congress refused to approve it in 1965, and it was not until mid-1966 that the deployment of the civic action group was finally authorized. The United States also considered approaching the Philippine Government with a request for combat troops for South Vietnam. CHUSMAGPHIL, however, advised against such a move, stating that the Filipino armed forces were in no condition to supply any combat troops, and the United States dropped the matter. The Filipinos did augment their medical and civic action teams that had been sent to Vietnam in 1964, raising the number of Filipinos in Vietnam from 32 to 72 men by the end of 1965.⁶³

61. (C NOFORN-GP 4) Military Working Arrangement between COMROKRV and COMUSMACV, 6 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 65). (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 070531Z Dec 65, JCS IN 84558.
62. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 73, 365-366.
63. Ibid., p. 369. (S-GP 3) JCS 2343/515-7, 11 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (14 Jan 65).

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Thailand, the only other Free World nation that had military forces in the RVN at the beginning of 1965, made no additions to its small force during the year. Late in 1965, however, the United States received feelers indicative that Thailand was disposed to provide cargo aircraft and shallow draft shipping to the RVN, but nothing had come of this by the year's end.⁶⁵

The year 1965 saw the introduction of the first third-country combat forces into the RVN and the increase of third-country strength from 388 at the beginning of the year to 22,404 by the end of December. 1966 was to bring a further expansion of the war and a doubling of US forces in Vietnam. Accompanying this vast increase would be a requirement for larger numbers of third-country combat troops to assist and support US forces. US military planning in late 1965 was already calling for the deployment of 23,500 additional third-country personnel to the RVN in 1966.⁶⁶

The RVNAF

A basic principle of US policy in Vietnam was support of the indigenous military forces, with the objective of strengthening these forces so that they could take over successfully the defense of their own country. In 1963, the Secretary of Defense had directed acceleration of a buildup of the RVNAF in the hope that the RVN would, within a reasonable time, be able to carry on counterinsurgency operations without the advice and assistance of substantial numbers of US military personnel. Preparations had been made to withdraw US advisors and units, but owing to the serious deterioration in the political and military situations in late 1963 and in 1964, the United States had chosen to increase rather than decrease its own military involvement.

64. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 370-371.

65. Ibid., p. 73.

66. Ibid., p. 273. (TS) Hqs. CINCPAC, Reprogrammed Phased Force Requirements for CY 66, 16 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65) sec 1A.

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In late 1964 and during 1965 the United States took measures to strengthen both the regular and paramilitary forces of the RVN. Improvement of these forces was greatly complicated by abnormally high desertion rates and inadequate enlistment and recruitment.

The Joint Survey Requirements

In late autumn of 1964, General Westmoreland, working with the RVNAF High Command, had conducted a survey of the structures of the RVNAF, the RF, and the PF. The survey was intended to determine what additional strength was needed in these forces so that they could simultaneously maintain search and destroy operations, protect key installations and cities, and support national and provincial pacification plans. This survey resulted in recommendations for additional forces which General Westmoreland sent to CINCPAC on 24 November 1964.⁶⁷

General Westmoreland set forth two alternatives for these force increases. Under Alternative One, the RVNAF would be increased by 30,000 men (mostly for the ARVN). Paramilitary forces would receive 110,000 additional men, raising the number of RF companies by 105 immediately and by 234 at the end of 1965. The PF would be increased by 64,000 men as soon as possible, with a total increase, at the end of 1965, of 79,000. These increases would, it was hoped, provide for progress in the Priority One Hop Tac area, arrest VC gains in certain other critical areas, and provide enough impetus to keep pacification machinery operating in the remaining areas of the RVN.

Under Alternative Two, paramilitary forces would not increase beyond Alternative One strength, but regular forces would be increased by 17,000 above Alternative One. Under this Alternative Two more progress would be achieved in pacification.

General Westmoreland pointed out that to support Alternative One increases the RVNAF must take into its ranks an average of 7,000 recruits per month. Alternative Two would require 8,000 per month. "It is not certain at this time," General Westmoreland told Admiral Sharp, "whether either of these figures can be supported. However, the lower figure is more reasonable estimate of manpower availability." Alternative One could, in view of training and equipment lead time requirements, be achieved

67. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 14864 to CINCPAC, 24 Nov 64.

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by the end of 1965, while Alternative Two would take until about mid-1966. From the standpoint of the inflationary impact upon the nation's economy the lower costs of Alternative One would be less damaging.

General Westmoreland believed that sufficient men could be acquired to support Alternative One and that all of the new units, except for armored units, could be trained by the end of 1965. Training of all personnel, except for NCOs, would also be accomplished by that time. The requirement for critical items of supply and equipment could be met by priority supply and shipment from the United States or by diversion from US Army stocks.

To support increased force levels, 446 additional US advisors would be needed under Alternative One, 606 under Alternative Two.

General Westmoreland stated that he intended to tell GVN military officials that, as a condition to US support of any strength increases, the GVN must agree to enforce its draft laws, actively carry out its population and resources control programs, and adopt certain improved personnel policies for the RVNAF. Some of its elite, but expensive, military units must also be disbanded.

COMUSMACV recommended that Alternative One be adopted. Ambassador Taylor concurred in this recommendation.⁶⁸

CINCPAC forwarded General Westmoreland's recommendation to the Joint Chiefs of Staff with his approval, during the important policy meetings that took place in late November and early December.⁶⁹

68. Ibid. (GP 3) Encls A and B to JCS 2343/500-1, 11 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64) sec 2.

69. (GP 3) Encls A and B to JCS 2343/500-1, 11 Dec 64, JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64) sec 2.

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RVNAF FORCES
11 December 1964

<u>Regular</u>	<u>Authorized</u>	<u>New Totals</u>	
		<u>Alt 1</u>	<u>Alt 2</u>
Army	217,300	240,953	258,200
Navy	8,162	14,476	14,476
Marines	6,555	6,555	6,555
Air Force	11,582	11,924	11,924
Total	243,599	273,908	291,155

<u>Paramilitary</u>	<u>Authorized</u>	<u>New Total</u>
		<u>End 65</u>
Regional Force	97,615	133,002
Popular Force	109,991	189,185
Coastal Force	4,640	no change
Total	212,246	322,189

Information derived from App to Encl A to JCS 2343/500-1,
11 Dec 64.

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On 17 December 1964, in line with the other important actions being taken and considered to improve the situation in the RVN, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he approve Alternative One, as a basis for discussion with the GVN, and the detailed MAP programming actions required. They asked also that he approve the US advisors for the new units, and that action be taken to obtain the additional funds in the FY 1965 and FY 1966 MAP to support the Alternative One program.⁷⁰

On 13 January 1965, in a memorandum to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense approved "in principle" the Alternative One increase and the associated US advisor increases. In the matter of funding he directed that \$35.9 million be funded from FY 1965 MAP and the remainder from FY 1966 MAP. "I shall coordinate with the Department of State on the matter of final approval . . . " the Secretary said.⁷¹

On 15 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that the US advisors had been finally approved. In the meantime the Services had already taken preliminary actions to move these advisors to the RVN.⁷²

In the face of the worsening military situation in the RVN, General Westmoreland, on 20 March, asked that he be authorized to accelerate the activation of 16 ARVN infantry battalions authorized under Alternative One. He asked also that, upon completion of Alternative One, he be given authority to put Alternative Two into effect. The 17,000 additional spaces under this latter alternative would allow the formation of 15 additional infantry battalions, four engineer battalions, one 155mm artillery battalion, and three M-113 troops along with additional administrative and logistic forces. He would be able to complete the training of the total 31 battalions provided in both alternatives by March 1966, as opposed to July 1966, but to do so certain conditions would have to be met. These included: 1) the GVN must be strong and take interest in conscription and recruiting to achieve a sustained 8,000 man per month input; 2) construction funds must be

70. (S-GP 3) JCSM-1074-64 to SecDef, 17 Dec 64 (derived from JCS 2343/500-1, 17 Dec 64), JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64), sec 2.

71. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 13 Jan 65, Att to JCS 2343/500-2, 14 Jan 65, same file.

72. (S-GP 3) Encl B to JCS 2343/500-4, 2 Apr 65, same file.

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provided speedily; 3) the GVN must agree to an increase in training facilities; 4) the GVN must agree to redistribution of equipment temporarily; 5) Washington authorities must take extraordinary MAP programming and supply actions; 6) approval of Alternative Two must be received by 1 April 1965.⁷³ General Westmoreland recognized that the GVN might not be able to support the manpower requirement and that there might be some slippage in the quality of training and equipment.⁷⁴

In spite of some concern that the Alternative One increases might not be achieved as readily as COMUSMACV was predicting, Admiral Sharp considered the need for a stronger RVNAF overriding. He recommended approval of General Westmoreland's latest recommendations.⁷⁵

In forwarding their recommendations to the Secretary of Defense on 8 April 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that they considered it "essential at this critical period to take maximum advantage of GVN capabilities to recruit and field the necessary military forces to support pacification operations." They believed that higher strength goals would act as an incentive to the GVN to set up an adequate recruiting program. Consequently they recommended that the Secretary authorize the Alternative Two program and the necessary advisor spaces, that he approve acceleration of the total force increase, subject to CINCPAC review of FY 1965 funding requirements, and that funds for the force increase be obtained from sources outside the world-wide MAP.⁷⁶

On 12 April the Secretary of Defense approved the additional RVNAF force increase.⁷⁷

On 5 May, COMUSMACV proposed that a tenth ARVN division be formed from three existing separate regiments. In order to do this he would need 2,369 additional spaces to form two

73. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 86874 to CINCPAC, 20 Mar 65, JCS IN 71332.

74. Ibid.

75. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 250102Z Mar 65, JCS IN 77121.

76. (S-GP 3) JCSM-265-65 to SecDef, 8 Apr 65 (derived from JCS 2343/500-4, 2 Apr 65), JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64), sec 2.

77. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 12 Apr 65, Att to JCS 2343/500-5, 14 Apr 65, same file.

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artillery battalions and some support units. He felt that this new division would be valuable in shoring up the weak east flank of the Hop Tac zone.⁷⁸ CINCPAC recommended approval of this request. On 27 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that he approve the necessary actions to form the new division. Secretary McNamara approved the request on 4 June, thus raising the authorized strength of the ARVN to 261,155.⁷⁹

As US forces became increasingly engaged in the RVN, General Westmoreland, in June, carried out another review of the force requirements of the RVNAF. The intensification of the fighting had caused battle losses of the RVNAF higher than had been anticipated. Equally serious, from the manpower standpoint, RVNAF desertion rates were soaring to inordinate heights. These factors had caused a shrinking in ARVN battle-field strength. General Westmoreland had decided, therefore, that he should concentrate on keeping existing units filled rather than on creating the new units authorized. He proposed a temporary moratorium on activation of new battalions and the diversion of fillers to units already in being. Admiral Sharp agreed. On 15 June the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed COMUSMACV temporarily to defer activation of 11 battalions scheduled for the next several months.⁸⁰

By 27 October, with US forces assuming a greater role in the combat, prospects for the RVNAF improved. General Westmoreland reported on that date that the buildup of the RVNAF was making better progress than had been anticipated. The desertion rate, for example, was declining and as a result the fighting strength of ARVN battalions had been raised to combat-effective levels. Fifteen new battalions were being trained. He had also been able to form the tenth ARVN division which was now operational. General Westmoreland said that he believed the manpower available in the RVN could support an input of 10,000 men monthly into the RVNAF for the remainder of FY 1966. On 2 November, COMUSMACV asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to approve a new strength level for the RVNAF, raising it to

78. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 14734, 5 May 65, JCS IN 47391.

79. (S-GP 4) JCSM-417-65 to SecDef (derived from JCS 2343/500-6, 25 May 65); JMF 9155.3 (23 Nov 64) sec 2. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 4 Jun 65, Att to JCS 2343/500-7, same file.

80. (S-GP 4) Encl C to JCS 2343/801, 28 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (9 Nov 65).

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311,500. Such an increase would avoid a forced reduction in current levels of conscription and recruiting and prevent a loss of momentum in the buildup which would take months to regain.⁸¹

General Westmoreland, in these recommendations, proposed to organize a Coastal Military Command. During JCS consideration of his overall recommendations, the Commandant, Marine Corps, stated that such a command would duplicate the functions of the Vietnamese Marine Corps and refused to concur in its establishment. When the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 13 April 1966 sent a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense asking that he approve continuance of recruiting and conscription for the RVNAF during FY 1966 and that he approve an end-FY 1966 RVNAF force level of 311,458 men, the Commandant, Marine Corps, concurred in the provisions of the memorandum except that calling for creation of the Coastal Force Command.⁸²

The Secretary of Defense approved the JCS recommendations, including that for establishment of the Coastal Military Command, on 25 April 1966.⁸³

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 27 April 1966, authorized CINCPAC to continue procurement of manpower for the RVNAF for the remainder of FY 1966 to attain the following strengths: ARVN - 274,769, VNN - 15,491, VNAF - 14,658, VNMC - 6,540, RF - 133,002, and PF - 189,195. With respect to the paramilitary forces, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that the buildup of the RVNAF would affect the RF and the PF. "In view of the critical role of Regional Forces and Popular Forces in the Rural Construction Program," they said, "request you give an appropriate priority to the recruiting, training and equipping of such forces."⁸⁴

81. (S-GP 4) JCS 2343/801, 28 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (9 Nov 65). (S-GP 4) Msgs, COMUSMACV 39875 to CINCPAC, 9 Nov 65, JCS IN 47121; CINCPAC to JCS, 112213Z Nov 65, JCS IN 47482.

82. (S-GP 4) JCSM-227-66 to SecDef, 13 Apr 66 (derived from JCS 2343/801, 13 Apr 66), JMF 9155.3 (9 Nov 65).

83. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 25 Apr 66, Att to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/801, 13 Apr 66, same file.

84. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 9439 to CINCPAC, 27 Apr 66.

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Chapter 23

GROUND COMBAT OPERATIONS - RVN JULY - DECEMBER 1965

The initial deployments of US combat troops were made before final decisions had been reached on exactly how US Marines and soldiers would be employed against the enemy. The concepts for their employment underwent close scrutiny during the ensuing months, as more and more US troops arrived in RVN, particularly with regard to whether or not the United States would assume the lion's share of the fighting and leave the pacification and security missions to the RVNAF.

The war could not wait for final resolution of this and other matters, and, in the natural course of events, hard and fast adherence to predetermined concepts was not always the case. Commanders in the field did what they had to do, insofar as their resources would allow, reacting to enemy initiatives and ARVN weaknesses with whatever tactics seemed most effective at the time.

As early as 22 April a small patrol of US Marines and RVN troops engaged in a fire fight with the VC near Da Nang. This marked the first combat encounter with the enemy by a US unit.¹

During May and June as US forces arrived and deployed, Marine forces engaged in aggressive patrolling around their bases at Da Nang, Chu Lai, and Hue/Phu Bai. By 7 June there were more than 50,000 US military personnel in RVN. By late June US airborne troops were engaging in search-and-destroy missions around Bien Hoa.² On 27 June a combined US/ARVN search-and-destroy operation took place in War Zone D, involving two battalions from the 173d Airborne Brigade and two ARVN battalions, with an Australian battalion and a US battalion in reserve. On 1 July the VC attacked Da Nang air base under cover of darkness, severely damaging six USAF planes. Evidence was captured showing that the attack might have been made by a force from the NVA 325th division rather

1. ~~(TS NOFORN)~~ NMCC OPSUM 93-65, 22 Apr 65.

2. ~~(TS NOFORN)~~ NMCC OPSUM 147-65, 25 June 65.

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than the VC. By this time contacts between US and enemy units had increased and the trend continued into July and August. The first major battle between US and VC forces took place in mid-August at Chu Lai. Intelligence reports had indicated a force of 2,000 VC building up for an attack on the Marine base. Elements of the 4th Marine Regiment were lifted by helicopter to designated landing zones while other units landed amphibiously near Chu Lai in a maneuver designed to link up with blocking forces and cut off enemy escape routes. The operation was highly successful, with the Marines killing approximately 700 VC, confirmed by body count.³

Concept of Employment - US/FWMA/RVNAF

During visits by the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to Hawaii and Saigon in July, General Westmoreland's Phase I deployment program for US forces had been presented to them along with some idea of how these forces were to be employed. The JGS, RVNAF had also briefed them on their version, prepared independently, of future operations in RVN. The gist of this briefing was that the GVN wanted to turn the highlands area over to US forces and move its own forces to the seacoast area, since GVN officials believed that their forces should be the ones to establish contact with the populace and handle the main security and pacification duties. The GVN officials wanted US Marine forces committed to search-and-destroy operations in I CTZ and the Army airmobile division sent to the Kontum, Pleiku and Phu Bon area as soon as possible. They also asked that another US infantry division be moved to RVN to operate in the Tay Ninh/Phuoc Long area, pointing out that the VC in III CTZ were defeating ARVN forces there. The whole briefing implied strongly that the US forces would have a more active role than the ARVN in fighting the enemy.⁴

General Westmoreland subsequently developed his concept for employing Phase I forces and the strategy, concept, and forces required for Phase II. Steps were taken to associate

3. (TS) Marine Corps Commandant's Vietnam Chronology, 1965, pp. 198-199.

4. (TS) Briefing, JGS RVNAF to SecDef et al., 17 Jul 65, Att to JCS 2343/636, 22 Jul 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Jul 65).

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the JGS with these planning efforts to develop a campaign plan for the phased employment of US/FWMAF and RVNAF forces during the latter stages of Phase I.⁵

On 27 August, in connection with their planning for deployments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared and forwarded to the Secretary of Defense a comprehensive set of recommendations covering US strategy in Southeast Asia, together with a statement of correlated military actions necessary to carry out this strategy. With specific reference to the war within RVN, they addressed the situation facing COMUSMACV and the RVNAF and the broad outlines of the strategies that would have to be employed. Specific major problems included the continued existence of a major VC infrastructure, both political and military; the greater growth rate of VC strength as compared to that of the ARVN; and the continued loss of LOCs, food-producing areas, and population to VC control. Insofar as the war within RVN was concerned, the basic military tasks were to cause NVN to cease directing and supporting the VC, to defeat the VC, and to extend GVN control over all of the RVN.⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the "US basic strategy for winning the war should include, within RVN . . . to improve the combat effectiveness of the RVNAF; build and protect bases; reduce enemy reinforcements; defeat the Viet Cong, in concert with the RVN and third country forces"

Analyzing the enemy's current strategy in RVN, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that the VC, directed and controlled by NVN, attempted to persuade the population to join them, using propaganda, intimidation and terror. Whenever possible, using armed assault and coercion, the VC destroyed the capability of GVN authority to govern an area, progressively reducing the GVN's ability to rally and exploit the support of the population. Once they had control of an area, the VC set up their own political organization and infrastructure.

5. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 32361 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 17 Sep 65, JCS IN 52156.

6. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-652-65 to SecDef, 27 Aug 65, (derived from JCS 2343/646-1), JMF 9155.3 (30 Jul 65).

7. Ibid.

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Making use of local people and local logistic support, the VC organized and trained military units to attack the GVN. Usually, said the JCS, the VC sought to avoid large-scale sustained battles with the GVN and the newly arrived US forces, preferring to strike at weak spots with superior force, then "fading away" when the combat ratio turned unfavorable. The current major objective of the VC appeared to be the destruction of the RVNAF.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also stated that to counter, successfully, the guerrilla warfare being waged by the enemy, control of the population and resources of the RVN must be seized. In RVN, the areas of greatest military significance were the Saigon area, the Mekong Delta, the coastal plain and the central highlands. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that US military action should be directed at eliminating the VC from these areas in order to provide security for the people there. The United States must build up and secure a series of bases and supporting LOCs at key localities along the coast from which offensive operations could be launched and sustained.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the principal effort of US and third country forces be to participate with the RVNAF in search-and-destroy operations while assisting the RVNAF in clearing and securing operations in support of the Rural Reconstruction effort. US/FWMAF air and ground operations should be conducted on a sustained basis, with attack and destruction of VC base areas directed at applying continuous pressure on the enemy.⁸

General Westmoreland issued his own concept for operations for the employment of US forces in RVN on 30 August 1965. He visualized operations by US forces in coordination with third country and the RVNAF in three phases: Phase I - commitment of US/FWMA forces necessary to halt the losing trend by the end of 1965; Phase II - resumption of the offensive by US/FWMAF during the first half of 1966 in high priority areas to destroy enemy forces and reestablish rural construction activities; Phase III - should the enemy persist, a period of a year to a year and a half following Phase II would be required for the defeat and destruction of the remaining enemy forces and base areas.⁹

8. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 9143 to CINCPAC, 25 Aug 65.

9. (S-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, Annex A, MACV, pp. 141-153.

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Specific military tasks to be accomplished in Phase I included: securing of major military bases, airfields and communications centers; defense of major political and population centers; offensive operations against major VC base areas to divert and destroy VC main forces; providing reserve reaction forces to prevent the loss of secure and defended areas; strengthening and preserving the RVNAF; providing adequate combat and logistic air support; maintaining an anti-infiltration screen along the coast and support forces ashore with naval gunfire and amphibious lift; providing air and sealifts as necessary to transport the minimum supplies and services to the civil population; opening necessary LOCs for essential military and civil purposes; defending, as possible, areas under effective governmental control.

During Phase II, pacification operations, which had come to a standstill, would be resumed and expanded. Those in the HOP TAC area around Saigon would receive priority. Other priority areas were the provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Tri, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh and Phu Yen. In support of these actions COMUSMACV's forces would carry out offensive and clear-and-secure operations and provide reaction reserves. Detailed concepts and tasks to be performed in each CTZ for each phase were set forth.¹⁰

In mid-September, COMUSMACV reported that his planning had culminated in a schedule of operations, part of which were even then taking place. These had been approved jointly by himself and by the Chief, JGS, RVNAF. In view of the deployment planning conference scheduled to take place in Hawaii at the last of September, General Westmoreland proposed to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff and to CINCPAC that he have presented there the strategy and concept for employment of Phase I and Phase II forces along with salient features of the campaign plan. Depending on how many additional forces were approved at the planning conference, he would then, in concert with the Chief, JGS, project the campaign plan forward.¹¹

10. Ibid.

11. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 32361 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 17 Sep 65, JCS IN 52156.

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Also in mid-September, General Westmoreland urged his commanders to work as closely as possible with the RVNAF, to encourage them, and by example and other means, to attempt to instill in them a professional approach and competence. He admitted the difficulties of working closely in operations depending on surprise. Because of widespread subversion, safeguarding operational plans was difficult, complicating the close coordination needed when combined US/RVNAF operations were being launched. "With a minimum of coordination at the lower level," he said, "but a full and frank exchange of information with senior ARVN commanders, it will be possible on certain occasions for US troops to make the initial assault with surprise and speed. ARVN troops can be held initially in reserve until the battle begins to develop and then they may be committed under more profitable circumstances and in such a way that victory for them is more likely." He instructed his commanders to establish whenever possible a combined command post with US and ARVN personnel collocated and in some respects integrated. This would allow the US commander and his staff to have a "heavy influence" on the tactical direction of the operation in question. These combined command posts were fully justified in view of the increasing dependence of the ARVN upon US helicopter and airlift support, and more recently, artillery and naval gunfire support. General Westmoreland urged extensive exchange of liaison officers, and the placing of US forward observers and forward air controllers with the ARVN to enhance US influence and control over ARVN operations. He also suggested close tactical cooperation between the US units and the RF and PF units, pointing out that close working relationships with these paramilitary forces could produce useful intelligence, and at the same time embolden and encourage the RVN forces to face the VC more resolutely.¹²

On 7 October CINCPAC, replying to a JCS request of 25 August, defined the role of the US forces in Phase II operations. In his view the mission of these forces was to defeat the VC and to extend GVN control over all of RVN. If the VC operated in large formations, US forces would conduct operations with the RVNAF to find, fix, and destroy them. If the VC reverted to small operations, US forces, in cooperation with the RVNAF, would clear, secure, and pacify areas as fast

12. (2-GP 4) Ltr, COMUSMACV to CJCS, 17 Sep 65, Att to JCS 2343/688, 27 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (15 Sep 65).

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as practicable. Periodic offensive operations would be conducted in VC-controlled areas by US and third country forces to destroy VC main force units and bases. All US activity would be closely coordinated with the GVN to stimulate an improved performance by the RVNAF. The US forces would help the RVNAF to defend major population centers, assist the RVNAF to regain the initiative, strengthen it, and aid the RVN in rural construction. The GVN would conduct rural construction operations with and without US military participation.¹³

The Secretary of State, his principal assistants, the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and General Maxwell Taylor, now returned to private life, were briefed on COMUSMACV's Phase II program on 21 October by General DePuy, MACV J-3.

During the ensuing discussions, attention was focused upon the concept for employment of US forces as compared with the role of the RVNAF. With the exception of certain elite ARVN units, airborne Marines and some Rangers, the ARVN would be mainly employed in pacification activities behind a "fighting screen" of US forces. The US troops would carry the battle to the enemy in the war zones and other areas where VC main force units were to be found.¹⁴

Among the salient points of General DePuy's briefing on employment concepts were that US troops would be deployed to defend bases and would conduct search-and-destroy operations generally in "penny packets." US commanders would visit RF and PF units and would have troops accompany and support RF companies on operations in areas that they normally avoided. COMUSMACV campaign plans specified areas where US forces would operate each month, opening roads, conducting clearing operations, and protecting the rice harvest. DePuy noted that this technique had already served to put the ARVN back in the war. Employment of 1st Cavalry Division units on the high plateau had already freed four or five ARVN battalions to work in the populated areas of Binh Dinh and Phu Yen. These ARVN forces, operating behind a screen of US units, would set the stage for pacification. US and ROK units would assist the GVN in defending all the province. An air cavalry brigade would periodically reinforce the RVNAF

13. (TS-GP 3) Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, 7 Oct 65, w/App A, "Concept for Vietnam," JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65) sec 2A.

14. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4827 to CINCPAC, 22 Oct 65.

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in operations against the VC in the Can Tho area. The GVN favored the concept of using their forces among the people while US forces screened against main VC units and operated on the edges of the populated areas and against the VC strongholds.¹⁵

General Taylor was particularly concerned that the GVN might be prepared to stand back and let the United States do the fighting. After hearing the briefing given by General DePuy on employment of Phase II forces, he observed that while the original concept seemed to have been for the US forces to assist the GVN, that concept seemed to have dropped out and the US ground forces were being saddled with the role of "primary doer." He questioned whether the United States was prepared to assume this preponderant ground role, while the ARVN fell back behind US units on pacification duty.¹⁶

General Wheeler asked Admiral Sharp on 22 October to clarify this, saying ". . . there is a need for us to have a clearer understanding of just what we can expect in the future from the ARVN" ¹⁷

This need for a "clearer understanding" was becoming apparent in other quarters as well. The US press and other news media were devoting considerably more attention to the operations of US forces in Vietnam than to those of the RVNAF. Ambassador Lodge, in early November, expressed concern over this and recommended firm guidance from State and Defense officials to all appropriate subordinates emphasizing that the United States was not taking over the war, that the GVN had the basic and essential role, and that the US role remained that of combat support to the GVN. Secretary McNamara, agreeing with the Ambassador, informed the Services and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, "Critical as our own operations may be it is an inescapable fact that final attainment of our goals in South Vietnam will depend to an even greater extent on effective operations by the RVNAF, which must continue to

15. (TS) Memo, CJCS to LTG Goodpaster, 16 Nov 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65.

16. (TS) Memo, GEN Taylor to SecState et al., 26 Oct. 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65.

17. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4827 to CINCPAC, 22 Oct 65.

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conduct the bulk of all actions against the VC, and on the stability and morale of the GVN as a whole." He instructed them to consider this statement as guidance within their respective areas of responsibility.¹⁸

On 2 November Admiral Sharp replied to the Chairman's query of 22 October regarding the role of the ARVN. He pointed out that there were four main types of operations in which ARVN and RF units would normally engage. These were search and destroy, clear and secure, reserve reaction, and defense of government centers. Defining these operations, CINCPAC stated:

Search and Destroy . . . are offensive operations undertaken against known or suspected VC base areas or force concentrations. These operations, often dependent on self-generated intelligence, are expected to locate and destroy VC forces or their base areas, destroying supplies, communications systems and training installations, thereby keeping the VC on the move and forcing him to reestablish in more remote areas, taking the pressure off the populated areas. . . . Clearing operations are Search and Destroy operations conducted in a well defined zone directed at destroying or permanently eliminating VC forces from that zone. They are sustained in nature and will only be undertaken when it is intended that securing forces will be assigned to the zone and the full range of pacification measures initiated. . . . Securing operations are those which provide long term security for the people in the hamlets, villages and districts, which have already been cleared of larger VC units and in which the Government is reestablishing effective control. . . . Reserve Reaction operations are designed to relieve province and district towns and units under attack. . . . Defense of government centers includes the protection of province capitals and district towns, key governmental facilities and installations. . . .¹⁹

18. (C) Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., 3 Nov 65, Att to JCS 2343/713, 10 Nov 65, JMF 9155.3 (3 Nov 65).

19. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 022214Z Nov 65, JCS IN 34023.

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Wherever possible, CINCPAC continued, RVN forces would be used to defend GVN installations and bases and in "Securing" operations. US forces would not engage in such operations except in areas around their own bases. While some ARVN battalions would be earmarked for "Reserve Reaction" and "Search and Destroy" operations, the bulk of the operations against VC forces and bases would be undertaken by the US/FWMA forces and the ARVN General Reserve (six airborne and six marine battalions).²⁰

General Wheeler considered the concept provided by CINCPAC to be "at considerable variance" with that set forth by General DePuy in his briefing on 22 October.²¹

On 10 November, the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented to the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum a concept of operations in extension and support of the earlier concept they had given him on 27 August. US and allied forces would continue to establish and expand a series of secure bases and key LOCs in localities along the seacoast and elsewhere as necessary, and would step up offensive operations launched from these and other bases to disrupt and destroy VC main force units and bases in order to assist the GVN to expand its control over the militarily and economically significant areas of Saigon, the Mekong Delta, the coastal plain, and the central highlands. This would deny principal recruiting and food-producing areas to the Viet Cong and would secure these resources to friendly control. It would increase the security of the people and obtain their increased support for the GVN. When the VC operated in large formations, US/third country and RVNAF forces would conduct operations to find, fix, and destroy them. When the VC dispersed and reverted to small-scale actions or guerrilla warfare, additional emphasis would be shifted to clearing, securing, and civic action operations. US/third country forces would conduct combat operations with primary emphasis on security of their own operating bases and LOCs, and, in conjunction with air and naval forces, would provide heavy assault strength against VC forces and bases. They would launch offensive operations to assist the RVNAF in the defense of major population centers. They would advise and assist the ARVN, conduct psychological operations, and assist in the rural construction program.

20. Ibid.

21. (TS) Memo, CJCS to LTG Goodpaster, 16 Nov 65, OJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65.

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The bulk of operations against VC and bases outside secure areas would be handled by US/third country and ARVN general reserve forces. The bulk of the ARVN forces would be committed to defending GVN installations and to securing operations.²²

General Taylor informed Secretary McNamara and the Chairman in a memorandum on 19 November that in their "paper" the Joint Chiefs of Staff seemed to be accepting the concept of the JGS, RVNAF, that US forces should have the "primary combat role" in RVN. He pointed out that he considered this a mistake from the points of view of "GVN psychology and US domestic opinion" ²³

The Village Burning Incident

The tactics developed by US forces in the first months of their operations against the VC were designed to carry the fight to the enemy in the environment and under the peculiar conditions that they faced in Vietnam. Because the fighting took place in populated areas, and because the enemy took full advantage of the presence of the civilian population and the native villages and hamlets, the danger to the civilian populace was great. This was particularly true in the vicinity of Da Nang where the US Marines, in company with RVN troops, conducted operations designed to seize control of an ever-expanding area around the city and US bases there. The VC had been extremely active and controlled many of the villages there before the Marines arrived on the scene.

On 10 July 1965, the CG of the III MAF, General Walt, had issued a directive pointing out that the number of non-combatant casualties resulting from US combat operations was of growing concern throughout Vietnam and ordering great care in the use of artillery, aviation, and other weapons capable of inflicting mass casualties. Their use in populated areas would be restricted to close support missions against clearly identifiable targets. "In short," he told his troops, "the utmost discretion, judgment, and restraint must be used in the application of all fire power." "It is

22. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-811-65 to SecDef, 10 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2343/655-26), JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65) sec 5.

23. (S) Memo, GEN Taylor to SecDef and CJCS, 19 Nov 65, CCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65.

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not the intent of this message to infringe upon the inherent right of an individual to defend himself from hostile attack," General Walt added.²⁴

On 3 August, a company of Marines conducted a search-and-destroy operation through the village of Cam Ne 4, south of Da Nang. They were accompanied by a Popular Force platoon of 22 men and a CBS-TV news team headed by an American. During the course of the operations, selective film was made by the TV cameramen, featuring the burning of a native dwelling and showing frightened RVN civilians. When shown on national television in the United States on 5 August, along with a highly biased commentary charging wanton destruction of native dwellings and the wounding and killing of harmless civilians, this film created adverse public reaction and brought outcries of protest against the Marines' tactics. The facts of the case were quite different from those shown by the TV report.

The village in question, Cam Ne 4, had been swept by the Marines on 12 July, at which time the place had been full of VC. Three Marines had been killed and four wounded. The village was full of caves, tunnels, and trench lines. Between houses were impenetrable hedgerows. Most of the houses in the village had access to underground tunnels far more elaborate than needed to protect the inhabitants. Many of the dwellings were not lived in. The overall nature of the place was that of a military fortification rather than a peaceful village.

When the Marines began their sweep on 3 August, they had come under heavy rifle and automatic weapons fire from the hedgerows--with three Marines being wounded. Of the 90 houses in the village, a total of 51 were burned from the effects of tracers, grenades, and 3.5 rockets. In only one case was a house deliberately burned, set afire with a cigarette lighter at the order of the company commander on the advice of the RVN district chief. It was this incident that was recorded by the TV camera. This particular house covered a concrete basement with a concrete tunnel outlet leading to a tunnel complex; and was unquestionably a tactical installation--not a peaceful dwelling. In the same operation a ten-year-old RVN boy was killed when a VC ran into the house in which the boy was hiding and was fired upon by an M-79 grenade launcher.²⁵

24. (C) Msg, CG FMFPAC to CMC, 070857Z Aug 65.

25. (U) Msg, COMUSMACV Telecon to NMCC, 050640Z Aug 65.

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As the Marines withdrew from the village at about 1500 hours, they again drew heavy fire from the same area from which they had originally been fired upon.

Operation SILVER BAYONET

With the arrival in the autumn of major US Army units, including the 1st Cavalry Division (AM) and the 1st Infantry Division, General Westmoreland expanded his attacks in the II CTZ, securing coastal areas and pushing forward along formerly VC-controlled LOCs into the highlands plateau area as earlier envisioned by General Johnson. These tactics brought increasingly strong reaction from the enemy, underscoring their effectiveness.

One of the earliest large-scale operations by the US Army forces was Operation GIBRALTAR, conducted by a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division in Binh Dinh province from 17 to 21 September. This search-and-destroy operation killed 226 VC with very light casualties to US forces.²⁶

An attack by the VC against a Special Forces camp at Plei Me, 25 miles southwest of Pleiku, on 19 October touched off a month-long campaign involving US, ARVN, and VC/NVA troops in the fiercest fighting to date in RVN. Following the attack, troops of the 1st Cavalry Division (AM) were ordered to provide security and artillery support to the ARVN forces around Plei Me. A reinforced brigade of the division launched search-and-destroy mission between Plei Me and the Cambodian border, killing or capturing 300 VC. On 14 November, in the Ia Drang Valley, the most significant phase of the operation began when the 3d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, attacked VC/NVA forces, of more than division strength and fighting from well-entrenched positions. US troops fought against the numerically superior enemy, in many cases hand-to-hand, in a series of fierce small engagements which frequently found the US units cut off. Repeated enemy attempts to overrun US positions using human-wave tactics were thwarted by the skillful use of air, artillery, and armed helicopter support. B-52s were used in a tactical role and caused heavy enemy casualties. This engagement was

26. ~~(S NOFORN)~~ GP 1) Rpt by CSA, Challenge: Compendium of Army Accomplishment, July 1964-April 1968, (1968), p. 6, JCS Hist Div Files. (Hereafter cited as CSA Rpt.)

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evidently a carefully planned communist move to test the behavior and reaction time of US forces. The enemy appeared willing to sacrifice his men in order to inflict an impressive loss on US forces. The enemy lost 1,286 men in the Ia Drang Valley, the US had 217 killed and 232 wounded. In its final phase which began on 18 November, ARVN airborne troops conducted a search and destroy operation west of Pleiku, killing another 265 of the enemy.²⁷

As SILVER BAYONET was taking place in the North, the US 1st Infantry Division was also engaged in successful operations in Bien Hoa province. Operation HUMP, a search-and-destroy mission by the Division between 5-9 November, killed 403 enemy with US losses of 50 killed.²⁸

The Enemy Threat Increases

These military successes by US forces encouraged and heartened the RVNAF. At the same time, however, they apparently caused the enemy to build up more rapidly in order to offset the growing US capability.

During General Wheeler's visit to RVN in late November 1965, General Westmoreland emphasized the seriousness with which he viewed the VC/PAVN build-up which had taken place and which was continuing, apparently at an accelerated rate.²⁹

US intelligence now accepted the presence in RVN of three regiments of the 325th NVA Division plus four other separate nondivisional regiments, the latest of which had arrived in mid-September. Evidence captured during the Plei Me battle in November pointed to the enemy's having formed another 325th NVA Division with cadres left by the parent unit. COMUSMACV's intelligence officer believed that one regiment of this newly constituted division was now in RVN. The two other regiments of this new division were either already in or were shortly to arrive in RVN.³⁰

27. ~~(TS NOFORN)~~ GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, Annex A, MACV, pp. 168-169.

28. ~~(S NOFORN)~~ GP 1) CSA Rpt, p. 7.

29. (TS) Msg, MAC 6020 (CJCS) to CSA, 29 Nov 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65.

30. ~~(S NOFORN)~~ Msg, MAC 6016 to DIA, 28 Nov 66, CJCS 091 Vietnam Nov 65.

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A regiment of the 304th NVA Division had been encountered at Plei Me. Reportedly, it had brought 120mm mortars into RVN, the first occasion on which these effective weapons had been introduced. All this evidence, if true, meant that NVN had nine regiments in RVN. Most disturbing to the US command was the increasing rate of NVA infiltration. There was growing evidence that as many as 12 battalions were now entering RVN each month. At the same time the infiltration of NVN cadre personnel for political, economic, and military organizations was continuing, supporting the formation of new VC units in RVN. US intelligence now accepted 83 VC battalions plus 27 NVA battalions for a total of 110 enemy battalions in the RVN. The VC controlled a manpower pool of 526,000 physically fit males between the ages of 16 and 45. They could form at least two new battalions each month and train at least 2,500 replacements, equating to five battalions. Taking into consideration training and infiltration capabilities and losses, the MACV J-2 believed that the enemy could have a force equivalent to 155 battalions in RVN by the end of 1966.

The enemy's ability to supply and maintain his forces in RVN was also examined by the MACV J-2 at this time. He estimated that NVN could move 300 tons per day from NVN through Laos into RVN during dry weather; this figure dropping to about 50 tons a day in the normal five months rainy season. The net result was an average daily year-round figure of 195 tons per day through Laos. Substantial support was also moved into RVN by way of Cambodia, believed to amount to a minimum of 25 tons per day. The total LOC capacity through Laos and Cambodia and by sea was given as a minimum 234 tons per day. Enemy forces then in RVN would, under light combat conditions, require only 84 tons per day.

Analyzing the enemy's strategy, the US intelligence officials believed that the enemy counted on a long war during which they would exact the maximum attrition on allied and, especially, US forces. They would avoid combat unless they could expect victory. They would try to keep a force ratio in their favor by conducting holding attacks against US bases as well as diversionary attacks to disperse US/FWMA/RVNAF forces and would attack simultaneously at widespread locations. They would attack US base areas in order to tie down security forces and to destroy aircraft, equipment, and supplies. They would mount attacks designed to cause the commitment of US general reserves. They would attack isolated units to inflict heavy losses. They would continue trying to dominate the highlands to secure their own base areas at the end of the Laos

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infiltration routes. They would keep continuing pressure on LOCs to terrorize areas under GVN control and to weaken the will of their population. The enemy would defend his own major bases because in order to fight a protracted war he would need the stockpiles of supplies he had built up in these bases over the years.

"Although the enemy has great capabilities he also has significant vulnerabilities," the MACV J-2 stated. "He must defend his logistic base areas, and his long logistical LOC is susceptible to interdiction. He is especially vulnerable to air and artillery attack, sustained combat operations, and aggressive pursuit. Additionally, he is dependent upon the support of the local population."

The DIA agreed in most part with the evaluation of the enemy by the MACV J-2. The tactics attributed to the enemy were considered by the DIA to be a "logical acceleration" of guerrilla warfare and represented tactics that had been employed by the VC, for example, in such recent engagements as Plei Me and the Ia Drang Valley. The concept, which the MACV J-2 termed "Strategic Mobility," had the objective of amassing sufficient numbers of maneuver battalions to pose a threat in widely separated areas, thus tying down large numbers of the friendly forces in static, defensive missions and allowing the enemy to destroy selected targets at times and places of his own choosing. DIA pointed out that the Viet Minh had followed these tactics successfully against the French. The only areas in which DIA did not completely agree with the MACV estimate were in enemy logistic requirements, which DIA set at 125 tons daily as opposed to the MACV figure of 84 tons, and the enemy capability to move into RVN at 214 tons a day as opposed to the MACV estimate of 234 tons per day.³¹

US intelligence officials estimated in December that VC strength had risen to 215,000--75,000 regular forces and regional troops, 100,000 guerrillas, and 40,000 support troops and political workers. This represented, despite heavy casualties, a net gain of approximately 50,000 since March 1965. Intelligence estimates placed the number of NVN regulars in RVN in December at 26,000.³²

31. (S-GP 1) Memo, Dir, DIA to D/JS, S-3589 AP-2F, 17 Dec 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 65.

32. (S-GP 1) DIA SIS-141-66, Jan 66, p. v, 9. NY Times 5 Dec 65, IV, 1; 27 Jan 66, 2.

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US military operations against the VC in late 1965 continued to be effective despite the enemy's increasing numbers. A highly successful search-and-destroy operation, BUSHMASTER II, was carried out by four battalions of the 1st Infantry Division between 28 November and 9 December in Binh Duong province. This operation, which destroyed enemy units and facilities in a VC base area, killed almost 300 VC and resulted in the destruction of a weapons factory and ammunition. US losses were 37 killed and 116 wounded.³³

33. (~~S NOFORN~~-GP 1) CSA Rpt, p. 7.

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Chapter 24

AIR, NAVAL, AND SUBSIDIARY OPERATIONS

In support of the ground forces in RVN the United States put into effect during 1965 programs based primarily on US air and naval power. These programs involved the use of B-52 bombers and other US planes in RVN, employment of US naval craft to halt sea infiltration from NVN, and the use of US planes against NVN infiltration through Laos. Because of these and other programs, it also became necessary for the United States to reconsider the restraints placed, primarily for political reasons, upon operation of its forces. As a result, some modification of the rules for engagement for Southeast Asia took place.

ARC LIGHT Operations

One of the most noteworthy US programs developed to defeat the insurgency was the ARC LIGHT program in which B-52s of the Strategic Air Command (SAC) were employed in RVN. On 11 February, in anticipation of continuing air operations following the reprisals against NVN, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had directed CINCSAC to deploy as soon as possible 30 conventionally modified B-52 aircraft to Anderson AFB, Guam, and 30 KC-135 jet tankers to Kadena AFB, Okinawa. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also had authorized additional tanker aircraft to support this movement and ordered CINCSAC to ready the B-52s for operations immediately upon arrival.¹

Just how these SAC planes would be used remained under active discussion during the first half of 1965. Military planners generally favored their use in bombing NVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had proposed this measure as early as November 1964 and, again in February 1965 in the first ROLLING THUNDER (RT) program. State Department officials, however, had opposed the employment of B-52s against NVN on the basis that the use of strategic bombers would represent a much higher level of military action against NVN than use of tactical aircraft and might cause a more drastic reaction

1. ~~(S-GP 4)~~ Msg, JCS 5000 to CINCSAC, 11 Feb 65.

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by Communist China and the Soviet Union. Other factors that militated against using them in RT were: B-52 bombing techniques required offset aiming points; some of the President's advisors were not convinced that B-52s could bomb as accurately as claimed; and all recognized the serious consequences that might result from the loss of a B-52 to enemy fire over NVN. The B-52s were therefore eliminated from the ROLLING THUNDER program.²

Because of the adverse impact on the overall readiness posture of his forces of keeping 30 B-52s on Guam and 30 KC-135 tankers on Okinawa in a conventional alert posture, CINCSAC informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 29 March that he proposed to remove one-third of both types of these planes. In view of recent events in Southeast Asia and of the other actions then in progress to increase the conventional capabilities in PACOM, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered CINCSAC to take no action to redeploy any forces from that area. Meanwhile, other developments were taking place that would eventually lead to the commitment of these heavy, long-range bombers to what amounted to a tactical role in RVN.³

The VC had built elaborate headquarters complexes and set up troop assembly areas over widely separated jungle areas in RVN. These included VC military region headquarters and entire enemy battalions spread over large areas, as well as groups of buildings, foxholes and trenches, tunnels, and underground storage depots connected by trails. Rough terrain and thick jungle cover hid them from air observation. Bombing these targets with fighter/bombers was generally unprofitable since the targets were widely spread and difficult to pinpoint. Even when located on maps or aerial photos, the targets were difficult to hit because the solid jungle canopy provided few aiming points for the attack aircraft. Nevertheless, because effective attacks on these targets would deal a serious blow to the enemy, the Joint Chiefs of Staff began considering the use of B-52s against area targets in the RVN early in March 1965. They recognized that among the

2. The technical aspects, including the formidable problem of guidance, control and refueling of the B-52s on their strikes, are well covered in the History of the Strategic Air Command, Study No. 101, 1965; and 107, 1966. Hereafter cited as SAC History, [year].

3. (S) Msg, CINCSAC 02583 to JCS, 29 Mar 65; (TS-GP 4) JCS 009079 to CINCSAC, 14 Apr 65.

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advantages of using B-52s were greater payload, ability to bomb accurately from high altitudes, invulnerability to AAA fire, and all-weather capability.⁴

In April, massed tactical aircraft struck against a VC area target at substantial cost but with poor results, thus making it clear that tactical bombers were unsuited for such missions. General Westmoreland urged the use of B-52s in similar future missions when he met with the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, at Honolulu on 19 April.⁵

Ten days later, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC and CINCSAC that in light of the current situation, they considered that the B-52s could be used for area saturation attacks against target areas known to include VC-occupied installations and facilities but for which precise target data to permit pinpoint bombing attacks was not available. They requested CINCSAC to develop a capability to use ARC LIGHT B-52s in area saturation attacks against this type of target. They further requested CINCSAC and CINCPAC to coordinate and provide plans for the use of B-52s in RVN.⁶

On 6 May CINCSAC and CINCPAC representatives met in Hawaii and agreed on the responsibilities for targeting and coordination procedures. SAC would prepare operations plans for the strikes.⁷

General Westmoreland pointed out to CINCPAC on 14 May that it was essential that the United States keep VC headquarters and units under attack. His intelligence people were even then developing information on the headquarters of the 325th PAVN division and on two VC Military Region headquarters, which included a large number of troops. The enemy was known to fear air attacks. The best way to keep him off balance and to prevent an unexpected large-scale VC attack would be to keep constant pressure on VC base areas. General Westmoreland stated that "for attacks on VC base areas, we must provide a capability which will permit us to deliver a

4. (TS) SAC History, 1965, vol I, p. 199.

5. Ibid. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 16006 to JCS, 14 May 65, JCS IN 59699.

6. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1047 to CINCPAC/CINCSAC, 29 Apr 65.

7. (TS-NOFORN) SAC History 1965, vol I, p. 201.

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well planned pattern of bombs over large areas and preferably within a short period of time."⁸

He had already discussed this problem with SAC representatives at Honolulu and believed that SAC conventional bombing tactics based on pattern bombing would be ideal for this requirement. "I strongly recommend, therefore, that as a matter of urgency, we be authorized to employ SAC B-52 aircraft against selected targets in RVN." General Westmoreland specifically recommended strikes against area targets in Kontum Province and War Zone D.

Ambassador Taylor concurred in the use of B-52s in strikes in RVN and foresaw no problem in getting GVN approval. He pointed out, however, that the use of B-52 forces would have some international political implications and that the State Department would want to look at the proposal carefully. The main problem might arise from Japanese objections against Okinawa being used as a launching base for strikes. Admiral Sharp strongly backed General Westmoreland's recommendation and asked authority to have SAC conduct the necessary radar photography over the target areas to assist in the strike planning.⁹

On 17 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved a single reconnaissance sortie, SHORT SPRINT, over the Kontum area. But shortly thereafter the targets in the Kontum area dispersed, and as a result, the sortie was cancelled. On 10 June, however, COMUSMACV informed CINCPAC of several new and significant targets, and asked that preliminary actions be taken so that ARC LIGHT forces could strike one of these as soon as it appeared sufficiently lucrative. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had coincidentally, that very day, approved in principle the use of B-52s in RVN provided suitable targets could be located. They asked CINCPAC for full operational details on these latest targets. The most promising target appeared to be a densely wooded area, two by four kilometers in size, in Ben Cat Special Zone northwest of Saigon. General Westmoreland believed that the area, which could be a launching point for VC attacks on Route 13, contained the headquarters of the Saigon-Cholon VC Military Committee, which directed operations

8. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 16006 to CINCPAC, 14 May 65, JCS IN 59699.

9. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 150214Z May 65, JCS IN 62112.

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in that part of RVN, and that three battalions of enemy troops were in the area. On 15 June he asked that the ARC LIGHT forces strike this area "to blunt a monsoon offensive in the area north of Saigon."¹⁰

After approval by higher authority, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the strike, ARC LIGHT I, executed on the morning of 18 June. On schedule, 30 bombers left Guam on the mission. Two of the aircraft collided in mid-air during flight to the target and one aborted. Twenty-seven reached the target and dropped a total of 1,530 bombs, mainly 750-lbs but with a few 1,000-lbs mixed in.¹¹

Ground teams, penetrating the area within hours after the bombing attack, found relatively few craters and no evidence that the raid had caused any VC casualties or damaged their installations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that a spate of prestrike message traffic and telephone calls might very well have tipped off the enemy that the operation was to be mounted. Despite this lack of success the President approved the next strike proposed, ARC LIGHT II, on 23 June, and added his hope that the results on this second strike would be better than the first.

On 14 July the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued general planning instructions for the conduct of ARC LIGHT operations, and assigned specific responsibilities to CINCPAC and to CINCSAC. And eight days later they authorized the conduct of routine B-52 reconnaissance flights over the RVN.¹²

Five ARC LIGHT missions were flown against targets developed by COMUSMACV in July. By 17 August nine missions had been flown. During the last five months of 1965 this rate increased sharply, raising the total number of missions flown by December to 130.¹³

10. ~~(S-NOFORN-GP 3)~~ SAC History, 1965, pp. 204-205.

11. Ibid., pp. 205-208.

12. ~~(S-GP 3)~~ Msgs, JCS 5774 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 14 Jul 65; (S-GP 3) JCS 6477, 22 Jul 65.

13. ~~(S-NOFORN-GP 3)~~ SAC History, 1965, vol I, p. 224.

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Approval Authority

After the first few weeks of ARC LIGHT operations the program had assumed a fairly routine aspect in the eyes of Washington policymakers. Although the President had been involved in the first strike approvals, the Secretary of Defense approved subsequent strikes. General Westmoreland developed his proposals on the basis of intelligence from various sources--which included GVN officials, agents, photography, and other means that indicated the existence of enemy forces or installations in a particular area. COMUSMACV forwarded his proposed targets to CINCPAC, who, in turn, examined the proposed targets, and sent the targets, along with his views, to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The next step called for a decision by the Joint Chiefs of Staff who, if they approved, recommended the targets to the Secretary of Defense. The Secretary of Defense consulted with the White House staff and the Department of State and, based upon their views and his own judgment, either approved or disapproved the strikes in question.¹⁴

There were flaws in the procedure from several viewpoints. First, it was time-consuming and cumbersome, and if a target was of a transitory nature, as in the case of troop concentrations, the full value of the strike might not be realized. Disconcerting to the Joint Chiefs of Staff was the lack of adequate intelligence information on some of the targets proposed by COMUSMACV. Air Force officials were not convinced that the ARC LIGHT strikes were in all cases justified. They were particularly disturbed by the fact that only occasionally were ground forces employed to determine results or to take advantage of damage done the enemy. Unfortunately, COMUSMACV did not have sufficient forces available to exploit more than a fraction of the strikes in 1965, nor could the ARVN generate adequate forces for this purpose. Nevertheless, having established the principle of approving targets largely on the recommendation of the field commander, the Joint Chiefs of Staff found themselves in the position of either breaking this precedent, or going along with the recommendation. On occasion they did ask for further intelligence support of recommendations. There was some concern among the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that in passing on these targets they were performing a function which in a normal situation would have been handled within the theater.¹⁵

14. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 29 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

15. (TS) Note to Control Div, "JCS 2343/663," 16 Aug 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

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The Okinawa Problem

The political problem that Ambassador Taylor had earlier noted might arise in connection with ARC LIGHT operations surfaced in late July, when, because of bad weather, B-52s were moved temporarily to Okinawa and launched a strike from there. Because of concern expressed by the Japanese Prime Minister that use of Okinawa for B-52 operations against RVN might cause an outcry from opponents of his government and serve to acerbate US/Japanese relations, State Department officials urged that the United States discuss its position with the Government of Japan. Under Secretary of State Ball advised Secretary McNamara that an aroused Japanese public might pressure its government to demand changes in US rights in Okinawa, a matter under continuing review. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had consistently held that unrestricted use of US bases in the Ryukyus was essential to the security position of the United States in Asia. Nor did they believe that the United States should make any concessions on this for political reasons at this stage. They urged in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 3 August that the unlimited right to all necessary use of the bases on Okinawa be upheld as a matter of national policy and that the United States not agree to consult with or notify the Japanese Government regarding their use. No formal reply was received although the matter was taken under consideration by higher authorities.¹⁶

Although the United States continued to use Okinawa for its tanker support, it did not normally fly the B-52s from there. On one other occasion in 1965, owing to weather conditions, the B-52s were moved to Okinawa and launched from there. The Joint Chiefs of Staff continued to believe that the United States should have unrestricted use of Okinawa, but realized that the Department of State would probably oppose any large-scale use of the island by the B-52s. They did not press the issue during the remainder of the year.¹⁷

16. (~~TS NOFORN~~) NMCC OPSUMS 174-65, 28 Jul 65, and 175-65, 29 Jul 65. (S-GP 3) Msg, Tokyo 361 to State, 30 Jul 65, JCS IN 72962. (S) Ltr USecState to SecDef, 31 Jul 65; (S-GP 4) Memo, J-3 to JCS, "Use of Okinawa Bases for Strikes in Vietnam," Encl to JCS 2343/648-2; (S-GP 1) JCSM-600-65 to SecDef, 3 Aug 65, (derived from JCS 2343/648-2), JMF 9155.3 (31 Jul 65).

17. (S-GP 3) SAC History 1965, vol I, p. 220. (TS-GP 1) App B to Encl B, JCS 2343/903-1, 22 Sep 66, JMF 9155 (12 Aug 66).

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Free Bomb Zones

In an effort to increase the flexibility he felt was needed in ARC LIGHT, General Westmoreland proposed on 16 August that five areas in RVN, known to be VC strongholds, free of friendly forces, and not close to RVN's borders, be designated as Free Bomb Zones (FBZs). These areas had been developed and approved by the JGS, RVNAF and the GVN. Ambassador Lodge, too, agreed with COMUSMACV's proposal.¹⁸

In essence General Westmoreland proposed that planned programs of strikes against worthwhile targets in the FBZs be approved in advance for execution when appropriate. The execution of these strikes would be handled directly between COMUSMACV and CINCSAC, and interested authorities would be kept informed. In order to get the program underway, General Westmoreland proposed five FBZs, delineating them geographically, and asked to strike seven target areas within these FBZs which were designated phonetically ALFA through ECHO.¹⁹

Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that General Westmoreland's proposal had merit, they did not feel that decisions on ARC LIGHT should be taken out of their hands entirely. Consequently they asked the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 2 August to vest in them the execution authority for the seven specific targets nominated by COMUSMACV for strike during the last week of August. Further, they proposed that he delegate to them execution authority for future strikes in the FBZs delineated. Requests for B-52 strikes outside the FBZs would continue to be processed as in the past.²⁰

The seven strikes were approved and executed late in August. But the Secretary of Defense did not approve the proposed procedure for FBZs until 29 September. He directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to keep the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) informed of proposed strikes in the FBZs. "With respect to proposed strikes against targets outside the Free Bomb Zones," he added, "the ASD/ISA will continue to transmit

18. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 16 Aug 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

19. (S-GP 3) JCSM-642-65 to SecDef, 21 Aug 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65). (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 28722 to CINCPAC, 16 Aug 65, JCS IN 95307.

20. Ibid.

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my decisions after considering White House Staff and Department of State views on the proposed strikes."²¹

Until the middle of August all ARC LIGHT strikes had been maximum effort, involving 30 B-52 bombers. With the approval of the FBZs, a provision for smaller, more frequent strikes went into effect.²²

A sixth FBZ area, approved by RVN officials and the US Ambassador, was recommended to the Secretary of Defense by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 23 October. This area lay in Tay Ninh province and was long known to have contained well-established VC base areas. At the same time the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the Secretary for authority to execute ARC LIGHT strikes within additional FBZs as they might be approved in the future by the GVN and the Ambassador. They received no immediate reply.²³

ARC LIGHT in Ground Support Role

One of the most successful applications of the ARC LIGHT fire power took place late in the year when B-52s from Guam flew close support missions for US troops fighting in the highlands along the Cambodian border. In this series of battles, the urgency of the situation underscored the need for a quicker reaction to calls for B-52 support. In an effort to achieve this, COMUSMACV, on 16 November, during operation SILVER BAYONET, asked to be allowed to deal directly with the SAC Commander on Guam, CG 3d Air Division, as well as for "blanket approval . . . for the conduct of the bombing effort" during SILVER BAYONET. Admiral Sharp concurred in this request. The Joint Chiefs of Staff thereupon authorized CINCPAC and CINCSAC to delegate to COMUSMACV and CG 3d Air

21. (TS-GP 3) Ltr, DepASD(ISA) (Far East and Latin American Affairs) to AsstSecState for Far Eastern Affairs, 26 Aug 65, Att to JCS 2343/663-2, 31 Aug 65; (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 29 Sep 65, Att to JCS 2343/663-2, 1 Oct 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

22. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) SAC History, 1965, vol I, pp. 225-226.

23. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-775-65 to SecDef, 23 Oct 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

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Division respectively the authority to establish direct liaison channels during the current operations in the highlands.²⁴

CINCSAC, however, declined to delegate this authority. As a result, on 17 November CINCPAC instructed COMUSMACV to continue to submit proposed targets in SILVER BAYONET operations to him for approval.²⁵

When, on the same day, General Westmoreland requested approval of a number of ARC LIGHT strikes in support of SILVER BAYONET, Admiral Sharp turned some of the strikes down because they were either on, or too near, the Cambodian border.²⁶

By 19 November, General Westmoreland was convinced his troops were facing an enemy force of at least division size. The enemy gave no sign of breaking contact. It was possible that a larger force was being assembled in Cambodia to join those already engaged. Since strikes in Cambodia were not permitted, COMUSMACV requested authority to direct B-52 strikes "up to, but not across" the Cambodian border in hopes of destroying enemy supplies in the border region.²⁷

CINCPAC responded immediately and authorized COMUSMACV to request ARC LIGHT strikes within any target boxes lying completely in SVN or target boxes lying partially within SVN, "stating an axis of attack which will provide reasonable assurance bomb pattern will fall within SVN."²⁸

Special approval authority to decrease B-52 reaction time was sought for the second time in December when the enemy attacked US/ARVN forces engaged in Operation BUSHMASTER II

24. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 40636 to CINCPAC 16 Nov 65, JCS IN 59258. (~~TS~~ NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, p. 429. (~~TS~~-GP 3) CINCPAC to JCS, 161152Z Nov 65, JCS IN 53089. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6459 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 16 Nov 65.

25. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 170011Z Nov 65, JCS IN 54209.

26. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 170248Z Nov 65, JCS IN 54306.

27. (~~TS~~) Msg, COMUSMACV MAC 40994 to CINCPAC, 19 Nov 65.

28. (~~TS~~-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 192304Z Nov 65, JCS IN 56907.

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in the Michelin Plantation area. COMUSMACV called for B-52 strikes against the enemy. He asked that ARC LIGHT "coordination and approval channels be decentralized" as had been done during SILVER BAYONET. This was approved on 3 December.²⁹

Attempts to Decentralize Control

These operations proved the value of ARC LIGHT in close support but pointed up the need for decentralized control of the B-52s. Of 149 targets that had been hit by mid-January 1966, for example, 139 had been processed for individual approval at the Washington level. The amount of time that had elapsed before approval had been received varied from 24 to 72 hours. In the several cases where a desired TOT was 24-30 hours after the initial request, only extraordinary efforts had made compliance possible.³⁰

The establishment of the FBZs had been a step in the right direction but had not gone far enough in the views of the field commanders. Even though the ad hoc measures to relax control in emergency situations had been approved in November and December, General Westmoreland and Admiral Sharp pressed for a more comprehensive solution to the problem.³¹

Both commanders believed the system inadequate. CINCPAC recommended on 6 November that the Joint Chiefs of Staff issue instructions to CINCPAC and CINCSAC setting out basic guidelines; also CINCSAC should be directed to provide a fixed number of B-52 sorties per month in support of CINCPAC. CINCPAC would then instruct COMUSMACV to request strikes at least 48 hours in advance of desired TOT, at the same time sending the action to the CG, 3d Air Division or CINCSAC with information copies to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Approval would be indicated automatically if the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CINCPAC or CINCSAC did not object. Twenty-four hours prior to the strike the CG, 3d Air Division would issue an order of intent to strike. Direct liaison would be authorized between COMUSMACV and the CG, 3d Air Division, for minor deviations

29. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 011645Z Dec 65, JCS IN 76588. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7795 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 3 Dec 65.

30. (TS) JCS 2343/663-6, 19 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

31. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 060140Z Nov 65, JCS IN 39525.

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from the plan. Any special requests--waiver of restriction, increase in monthly sorties, etc.--would be submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for approval. Although he stated that he must retain demurrer authority on strike requests, CINCSAC generally agreed with CINCPAC.³²

Apparently, the Secretary of Defense had been thinking along the same lines. Although on 18 December he approved, with a minor adjustment, the sixth FBZ that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had proposed on 23 October, he did not give the Joint Chiefs of Staff carte blanche to create further FBZs based on GVN and US Ambassador approval. He wanted less emphasis on creation of FBZs and greater emphasis on analyzing current procedures. He instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to conduct a full review of current ARC LIGHT procedures "with the objective of establishing a firm basis for providing the highest attainable level of effectiveness, flexibility and responsiveness in the employment of ARC LIGHT forces generally."

Secretary McNamara noted that this was particularly important because it was very likely that the situation now developing in RVN would require a "substantial increase" in the scope of ARC LIGHT in the months ahead. He warned that any changes in current procedures must allow quick cancellation or recall if political reasons required, that non-combatant casualties must be avoided, that neutral borders must not be violated and that the program must not be allowed to lapse into routine operations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff directed the Joint Staff to begin the survey of ARC LIGHT immediately.³³

Other Air Operations in RVN

At the beginning of 1965, air operations against the VC were hampered by restrictions. First, COMUSMACV was not authorized to use US jet aircraft flown by US pilots against targets in RVN and, secondly, he was required to have a VNAF

32. Ibid. (T) Encl C to JCS 2343/663-6, 19 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

33. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Employment of ARC LIGHT Forces," 18 Dec 65, Att to JCS 2343/663-4, 20 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).

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observer or pilot in all FARM GATE or air commando aircraft operated by US pilots. General Westmoreland cited these in mid-January as two of the major constraints affecting his operations.³⁴

On 27 January the Joint Chiefs of Staff had authorized COMUSMACV to use US jet aircraft in a strike role in RVN in emergency situations, but subject to certain conditions. Three weeks later the Joint Chiefs of Staff specifically authorized the use of US jet aircraft to reinforce the VNAF in concentrated and discriminate attacks against the VC in eastern Phuoc Tuy province, using conventional weapons and making sure that the civilian population suffered as little injury as possible.³⁵

Use of US Jets

Admiral Sharp advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 26 February that the greatest single action the United States could take to improve the security situation in RVN would be to make full use of its air power. He believed that continuous use of US air power in RVN could harass the VC and destroy their supplies to the point that they would spend all their time and energy trying to hide from air attacks.³⁶

General Westmoreland reported on 27 February that the few US jet strikes that had taken place in RVN had had a salutary morale effect on RVN forces. He cited the many advantages of employing jet aircraft, including the speed of reaction time, increased number of strikes and increased ordnance delivery capabilities, improvement in the night air strike capability, and greater accuracy in strikes resulting from the inherent stability of the jet plane as a gun platform. Disadvantages noted were that such use violated the Geneva Accords of 1954 and that it might encourage the RVNAF to rely too greatly on US forces.³⁷

34. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 155 to JCS, 13 Jan 65.

35. (TS) Msg, JCS 5316 to CINCPAC, 16 Feb 65.

36. (TS-GP 4) JCS 2343/530-6, 3 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3
(21 Jan 65).

37. Ibid.

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The Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred with the views of the field commanders on the use of US aircraft in RVN and so informed the Secretary of Defense on 6 March. They recommended sending a message to CINCPAC authorizing him to use his aircraft to reinforce the VNAF and/or to support RVNAF operations when he judged it prudent to do so.³⁸

Secretary McNamara approved this recommendation and on 9 March the Joint Chiefs of Staff granted authority for use of US aircraft in RVN as CINCPAC judged prudent, stipulating, however, that strikes in RVN would not originate directly from bases in Thailand.³⁹

Use of FARM GATE Aircraft

Fifty FARM GATE aircraft, A1Es, were flying daily air strikes in the RVN against the VC. Although flown by US pilots, these planes carried VNAF insignia. There was also a requirement that VNAF observers be present on all combat flights as additional crew members. General Westmoreland pointed out on 27 February that air operations were being complicated, reaction time frequently slowed, and sortie effort lost because of the requirement that these aircraft operate only with a combined US/VNAF crew. VNAF observers contributed to the mission mainly by relieving the USAF of the "stigma" of unilateral offensive action against the VC. In some cases these observers were helpful in spanning the language barrier but this was not always true since some of them spoke no English and only a few spoke it fluently enough to be completely reliable in this regard. There were, on the other hand, very definite difficulties in using these observers. They were not well disciplined or motivated in many cases. Most of them resisted flying two sorties daily and several had refused to do so.⁴⁰

Emergency requirements for increased numbers of FARM GATE sorties were continually arising. In the case of close air support for forces being ambushed, these requirements

38. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-161-65 to SecDef, 6 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/530-6), JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65).

39. (TS) Msg, JCS 6692 to CINCPAC, 9 Mar 65.

40. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-160-65 to SecDef, 6 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2343/530-7), JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65).

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arose most frequently in the late afternoon when most of the normal sortie effort had already taken place. Support of downed aircraft could and did require immediate reaction and prolonged air cover, which required sorties at a greater rate than planned. Combination of heavy ground action and development of lucrative air targets required diversion of immediate effort into the areas of action and frequently required additional sorties to replace those diverted from other tasks and/or additional sorties in support of the ground action.⁴¹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed Secretary McNamara on 6 March that they believed the ground rules for employment of FARM GATE aircraft had now been overtaken by events.

The mission of the air commando squadrons clearly had changed. Out of operational necessity these squadrons were now devoting 80 percent of their effort to combat rather than to training functions. Their mission, like that of other US air elements in RVN, had become one of close support of the RVNAF. The GVN sought this support, and since the VC had long been claiming that the entire air war was being conducted by the United States, a formal change of mission would bring no greater propaganda value to the enemy. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the air commando squadrons be specifically charged with combat operations in support of the RVNAF as well as with their training functions. They recommended that the US planes, A1Es, be permanently marked with USAF insignia for both in- and out-of-country operations, and that the air commando planes be authorized to conduct operations without VNAF personnel aboard. The Secretary of Defense approved these recommendations on 9 March 1965.⁴²

Establishment of STEEL TIGER

One of the actions that had been agreed upon in the Washington Conference in November-December 1964 had been air strikes against PL/NVN infiltration and operating forces in Laos. These strikes, nicknamed BARREL ROLL and designed

⁴¹. Ibid.

⁴². Ibid. (S) Memo, OSD to Secy, JCS, "FARM GATE Restrictions in the Republic of Viet-Nam (C)," 12 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (21 Jan 65).

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primarily to support the RLG, had begun on 14 December. General Johnson, on his return from RVN in mid-March, had proposed that the strikes be redesigned and reoriented so as to cut off the infiltration routes used by the NVN/VC to move men and supplies through Laos. The President had approved this recommendation.

To this end Laos was divided into two sectors for US air operations, the northern one known as BARREL ROLL, and the sector to the south, through which ran enemy infiltration routes, designated STEEL TIGER. STEEL TIGER was established as a separate air program on 3 April 1965.⁴³

MARKET TIME Background

US officials had long suspected, without much proof, that the communists were smuggling weapons and other supplies from NVN to the VC by sea. Such measures as the GVN had taken against sea infiltration had been largely ineffective, owing mainly to the inadequate strength and apathetic performance of the VNN.

At the beginning of 1965, the VNN had available for employment in coastal surveillance about 16 Sea Force ships and 200 Coastal Force junks. A US Navy survey showed, however, that fewer than ten percent of the craft which could have been at sea on anti-infiltration duties were actually at sea at any one time. Weaknesses in command structure and general administration and personnel inadequacies abounded in the VNN, hampering its operations. The Coastal Force junks, for instance, were controlled by province chiefs, who did not always assign them delineated zones of surveillance. Political considerations often influenced assignment of patrol areas. As a result, there was a maldistribution of the junks of the Coastal Forces.⁴⁴

US assistance and advice to the VNN was charged to the Chief, Naval Advisory Group (CHNAVGP), under COMUSMACV. He reported to COMUSMACV in early 1965 many weaknesses in the VNN, including inadequate communications and poor leadership and command procedures. His reconnaissance planes had verified specific instances in which the VNN was failing to perform the counter sea-infiltration mission. The Coastal Forces in particular were singled out for criticism. These forces, operating with limited resources, were not being

43. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, pp. 390, 402. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) JCS 7624 to CINCPAC, 23 Mar 65.
44. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 87-89.

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used properly and merely gathered and reported information on infiltration rather than taking direct action against it.⁴⁵

In short, the VNN did not possess the leadership, the resources, or the organization to conduct an effective counter-infiltration program. If the enemy were indeed infiltrating substantial amounts of supplies and if this infiltration were to be curbed, the United States would obviously have to take a more direct hand in the operations. But, until discovery of a major act of sea infiltration by the enemy, US authorities were not inclined to press the matter of a greater US involvement against sea infiltration.

The capture of an armed, steel hulled vessel in Vung Ro Bay in Phu Yen Province on 16 February 1965, however, alarmed US officials and led to a drastic change in policy. The vessel carried large quantities of modern weapons and ammunition, including recoilless rifles, submachine guns, and grenades, most of Chinese Communist origin. Some of the munitions captured had manufacturing dates of October and November 1964 stamped on them. Further search of the bay area revealed much more contraband on shore, pointing to other landings of supplies in the area. At high levels in the Department of State this capture was viewed as proof of a rise in the tempo of the war.⁴⁶

On 26 February, the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed the matter and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, asked Admiral Sharp for his recommendations on steps that could be taken to arrest sea infiltration. CINCPAC immediately recommended that the US Seventh Fleet "sanitize" the water boundaries of RVN from the 17th Parallel to the Cambodian border, in coordination with the VNN, and with CHNAVGP acting as liaison between the two forces. He also recommended US Navy surface patrols off the 17th Parallel, Vung Tau, and in the vicinity of the RVN/Cambodian border in the Gulf of Thailand. In addition US carrier-based planes would conduct dawn-to-dusk patrols, going north of the 17th Parallel as necessary to spot approaching traffic. The GVN would be asked to declare a 40-mile-wide restricted area around its coastline; suspicious craft within this area would be stopped and searched by the VNN, or possibly US patrols.

On 11 March 1965, without awaiting formal approval, US naval forces established a patrol of the RVN seacoast, but confined their activities to detecting and tracking suspicious vessels and reporting them to the VNN. The VNN

45. Ibid., p. 173. (~~TS-NOFORN~~-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, p. 435.

46. (~~TS-NOFORN~~) NMCC OPSUM 40-65, 18 Feb 65, p. 1.
(C) Msg, Saigon 2710 to State, 23 Feb 65, JCS IN 37579;
(TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 12.
(TS-NOFORN-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, p. 436.

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stopped and searched the vessels to determine if they were carrying arms or other supplies for support of the VC. If found to be carrying prohibited items, the VNN seized or destroyed these vessels as appropriate.⁴⁷

Admiral Sharp, on 15 March, pointed out to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that a new family of weapons being received by the VC would require even greater logistical support. He suspected this would mean increased efforts to infiltrate supplies by sea. He reiterated his recommendation that the RVN coast be "sanitized" by setting up a barrier of US and VNN ships. Random surface patrols, round-the-clock air patrols, and photo reconnaissance of suspected landing areas would be employed. US ships and planes would concentrate on locating ocean shipping headed for RVN or discharging cargo along the coast. CINCPAC listed the numbers and types of ships that would be needed for this increased effort. He also recommended amphibious raids against the VC, as well as naval bombardment of VC targets. He reminded the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the current rules of engagement for Southeast Asia did not authorize US forces to board, search, or seize suspicious ships on the high seas, but limited them to surveillance operations of the coastal area. CINCPAC recommended that the GVN be approached to see if it were willing to ask for US assistance so that the US role might be revised.⁴⁸ On 18 March, in line with the President's action, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved CINCPAC's concept for the sanitization of the RVN coast, but instructed him to adhere to the current rules of engagement for Southeast Asia.⁴⁹

On the same day General Johnson, on his return from RVN, and as a part of his important recommendations to the President, had also called for increased air and naval reconnaissance and harassing operations against the VC-controlled coastal areas associated with infiltration. He proposed that elements of the Seventh Fleet set up patrols by sea and air. He also proposed a program of cash awards for the capture of NVN junks. These recommendations by the Chief of Staff, Army, were approved by the President on 15 March.⁵⁰

47. (SS-GP 3) CNOM-113-65 to JCS, 1 Apr 65, Att to JCS 2343/560, JMF 9155.3 (1 Apr 65).

48. (SS-GP 3) CINCPAC to JCS, 152206Z Mar 65, JCS IN 64176.

49. (SS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 7307 to CINCPAC, 18 Mar 65.

50. (SS) Msg, JCS 7484 to CINCPAC, 20 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Mar 65).

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On 31 March, Ambassador Taylor, who was visiting in Washington, cabled his Deputy in Saigon, U. Alexis Johnson, telling him to suggest to Premier Quat the possibility of a change in the USN role in sea surveillance operations. The new role would authorize US personnel to stop, board, and search RVN vessels as agents of the GVN. RVN military personnel could be aboard US vessels to do the actual boarding and searching if the Premier found it more acceptable.⁵¹

Subsequently, however, the State Department decided that it required more from the GVN than had been requested by Ambassador Taylor. On 2 April, the State Department cabled Ambassador Johnson that the GVN should be asked to: 1) Request the US assist in maintaining the integrity of her territorial waters. 2) Grant authority for US naval ships to stop and search any RVN vessel in international waters and to seize or, if necessary, destroy those found to be carrying arms or other supplies for the support of VC insurgency in RVN. 3) Grant authority for US naval ships to stop and search any RVN, DRV, or private vessels of other nations within the territorial waters of the RVN and to seize, or, if necessary, destroy those found to be carrying arms or other supplies for the support of VC insurgency in RVN. 4) Provide RVN personnel to be assigned to each US Naval ship engaged in the Counter Infiltration Patrol for liaison and interrogation purposes.⁵²

Ambassador Johnson replied that same evening indicating that the GVN viewed the proposals favorably. As instructed, the Ambassador had stressed the need for an official GVN request for US assistance. It was agreed that Ambassador Johnson would draw up a draft copy of a GVN request for assistance and a similar draft of a US Government reply to such a request.⁵³

Meanwhile on 1 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense had pointed out the advantages of acquiring GVN authority to stop and search all RVN vessels in international waters; to stop and search RVN,

51. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 2141 to Saigon, 31 Mar 65, JCS IN 86479.

52. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 2171 to Saigon, 2 Apr 65, JCS IN 90310.

53. (S) Msg, Saigon 3190 to State, 2 Apr 65, JCS IN 88860.

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DRV, or private vessels of other nations within the territorial waters of the RVN; and to seize or, if necessary, to destroy vessels carrying arms or other supplies to the VC. They said that VNN personnel should be placed on the US ships for liaison and interrogation purposes. They recommended that Secretary McNamara support such actions by asking the Secretary of State to seek GVN approval of them, stipulating that, if it were deemed advisable, the United States would agree to having VNN personnel embarked on its ships to conduct the visit, search, and seizure of suspected vessels.⁵⁴

On 8 April, in a joint State-Defense message, Ambassador Taylor was instructed to modify the request to the GVN to insure compliance with accepted international legal principles and to increase operational flexibility. This would involve announcement by the GVN of compliance with the Geneva Conventions on the seas and customary international law. The GVN would also announce that it had asked the United States for help in countering sea infiltration. The GVN would further declare its territorial waters up to the three-mile limit a "Defensive Sea Area" wherein it would, with US help, stop and search any vessel of any nation and size suspected of supporting the VC. If necessary it would destroy any vessel carrying arms or other supplies to the VC. Other suggestions to be made to the GVN called for it to declare its intentions to enforce its customs, fiscal, and immigration laws within a 12-mile contiguous zone along its coast, setting forth the specific actions to be taken in this regard, and to specify other actions that would be taken beyond the 12-mile zone to prevent any infringement of its laws by vessels flying the flag of the RVN or reasonably believed to be disguised RVN vessels. RVN representation would be present wherever US assistance was provided in any of these cases.⁵⁵

The GVN submitted a formal request for US assistance on 23 April. Within 24 hours, Ambassador Taylor informed the GVN that the request had been approved by the United States and that the assistance would be forthcoming.⁵⁶

54. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-241-65 to SecDef, 1 Apr 65, Encl to JCS 2343/560, 1 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Apr 65).

55. (TS-GP 1) Msg, DEF 8710 to Saigon, 8 Apr 65.

56. (TS-GP 4) Memo, OCNO to SecNav, 29 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (14 Apr 65).

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On 27 April, the GVN announced its intent to enforce Decree No. 81/NG to insure the security and defense of the territorial waters of RVN. This decree encompassed all of the provisions that the United States had proposed be included.⁵⁷

Command and Control Arrangements - MARKET TIME

The US operations that had begun on a limited scale in March, were now expanded into a full-scale program of air and sea activities in coordination with the GVN, known as MARKET TIME. These operations were under the overall command and control of CINCPAC with the chain of command running downward through CINCPACFLT to CTF-71, who had the immediate responsibility for anti sea-infiltration operations in the early part of the year. However, in order to take advantage of the location of NAVGP in RVN and of its experience in dealing with the VNN as well as to give COMUSMACV greater control of MARKET TIME, the Secretary of Defense decided to transfer operational responsibility for MARKET TIME to COMUSMACV.⁵⁸

General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp on 30 April that Secretary McNamara wanted steps taken so that COMUSMACV could assume responsibility for MARKET TIME by 1 August. He realized that General Westmoreland did not have the capability to assume control immediately and that CTF-71 would retain that responsibility during the transition period.⁵⁹

During this period General Westmoreland should take necessary actions to: improve the capabilities of the VNN to participate effectively in MARKET TIME, establish a communications net which would enable communications with appropriate shore stations and stations afloat, establish an operations center, and establish an intelligence net.⁶⁰

57. (TS) Msg, Saigon 3550 to State, 27 Apr 65, JCS IN 31995.

58. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 173.

59. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 1149 to CINCPAC, 30 Apr 65.

60. Ibid.

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An augmentation of the NAVGP was authorized by the Secretary of Defense to meet the increased requirements.⁶¹

The Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, during their July visit to Saigon, talked with General Westmoreland about MARKET TIME. Secretary McNamara was not convinced that the enemy was bringing in any significant amounts of supply by sea. He had not seen any real proof other than the capture of the single enemy supply vessel in February. Nevertheless, on his return, he indicated a desire to build up MARKET TIME forces and "saturate" the coastal areas to cut off any infiltration that might be going on. He took back to Washington a "shopping list" given him by General Westmoreland, which included, among other things, a sizeable package for buildup of MARKET TIME.

Among the MARKET TIME items that General Westmoreland had asked for were 60 modern, motorized junks for the Junk Force, expedited delivery of 20 Swift patrol craft with US crews, expedited procurement of 34 additional Swift patrol craft and certain communications equipment. The 60 motorized junks were needed to replace a like number of sail-only junks which were old and in poor condition. COMUSMACV wanted delivery of these started on 30 November and completed by 31 March 1966. The Swift patrol craft, which had been used in OPLAN 34A operations were excellent for patrolling and investigating inshore areas. Twenty Swifts already on order would be used to seal off coastal lanes around the 17th Parallel and in the Gulf of Thailand, but the 34 additional craft would be needed on the central coast. The Swifts would be manned by US personnel until the VNN was capable of taking them over, probably in late 1966. The Swifts could do some surveillance and intercept jobs as well as destroyers and at considerably less cost.⁶²

COMUSMACV assumed control of MARKET TIME forces on 30 July 1965. CHNAVGP, Rear Admiral N.G. Ward, was given

61. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 9 Aug 65, JMF 1040.1 (2 Jun 65).

62. (S) Memo, COMUSMACV to SecDef, 20 Jul 65, w/Encl, "MACV Shopping List for Secretary of Defense," items 74, 75A, 75B, 75C, JMF 9155.3 (20 Jul 65).

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command of TF-115, integrating sea, air, and shore-based units for MARKET TIME operations.⁶³ The initial force assigned to TF-115 included: seven radar picket escort ships (DERs); two ocean mine sweepers (MSOs); 17 82-foot cutters (WPBs); and SP-2H aircraft. In addition to these, TF-115 received two divisions from the United States Coast Guard Division #12. Combat Tactical Group (CTG) 115.3 was sent to Da Nang. CTG 115.4 was assigned to Phu Quoc Island to patrol the Gulf of Thailand.⁶⁴

COMUSMACV divided the RVN coastal area into nine patrol zones, extending from the 17th Parallel to the RVN/Cambodian border and 30-40 miles out to sea. DERs, or MSOs when the former were not available, patrolled each zone. Aircraft based at Tan Son Nhut were given surveillance missions along the coast and the sea area between Vung Tau and the Brevie line. Aircraft stationed at Sangley Point, Philippines, patrolled the coastal region between Vung Tau and the 17th Parallel. Barrier operations at the 17th Parallel and Cambodian/RVN border were assigned to the Coast Guard.⁶⁵

NAVGP operations were also improved. An intelligence disseminating organization, centered around the Surface Operations Center (SOC) in Saigon, was established. SOC examined all information dealing with MARKET TIME operations and directed operations to intercept, capture, or destroy hostile vessels. The SOC received its information from five Combined Coastal Surveillance Centers located along the SVN coast. In turn, the CSCs gathered reports from all USN and VNN surface and air units, sending their findings to the SOC for a more complete and detailed examination.⁶⁶

By late 1965, MARKET TIME operations were sufficiently established to deny enemy shipping freedom of movement along the coast. The VC were still transporting personnel and equipment by sea but the extent of their success was still

63. ~~(TS-NOFORN-GP 1)~~ COMUSMACV Command History, 1965,
p. 100.

64. ~~(TS-NOFORN-GP 3)~~ CINCPAC Command History, 1965,
vol II, p. 443. ~~(TS-NOFORN-GP 1)~~ COMUSMACV Command History,
1965, p. 100.

65. ~~(TS-NOFORN-GP 3)~~ CINCPAC Command History, 1965,
pp. 433-434.

66. ~~(S-GP 4)~~ MACV Directive 525-4, "Tactics and Tech-
niques for Employment of US Forces in the Republic of Vietnam,
(U)," 17 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (17 Sep 65). (TS-NOFORN-GP 3)
CINCPAC Command History, 1965, p. 440.

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unknown. While VNN units had improved, their performance was still not up to par. They had performed their missions with greater aggressiveness and added three vessels to the ships already involved in MARKET TIME operations; but these limited improvements had not met the standards established by CHNAVGP. The Coastal Force was still having many of the same difficulties it had experienced at the beginning of 1965. It suffered from a general lack of routine maintenance, untrained personnel, and inadequate leadership. Because of these conditions, CHNAVGP rated it as "satisfactory" in his year-end evaluation.⁶⁷

COMUSMACV submitted an evaluation of MARKET TIME during the Secretary of Defense's visit to RVN in November. He considered MARKET TIME operational concepts and efforts to be satisfactory considering available resources. Fifty-four Swifts were to be delivered in the Spring of 1966 and he felt they would satisfy requirements for the present. He was not satisfied with the VNN performance. Its aggressiveness and accuracy of reporting left much to be desired but he felt the situation could only be improved through increased advisory efforts. COMUSMACV concluded that no major changes were necessary and none was anticipated. He believed progress in MARKET TIME operations could continue so long as programmed forces materialized.⁶⁸

Cross-Border Operations into Laos--SHINING BRASS

Sea infiltration of South Vietnam was but one means that NVN used to aid the VC. The major source of NVN assistance to the VC had long been the overland infiltration of men and supplies through the Laos panhandle. To interdict this infiltration, the United States had initiated several aerial reconnaissance and bombing programs in Laos beginning in May 1964.

Another method of controlling the panhandle infiltration was cross-border ground operations into Laos to identify and

67. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, pp. 443, 446. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 89.

68. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 174-175.

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destroy infiltration targets. Such operations had been under consideration since the spring of 1964, but the fragile condition of the Royal Laotian Government and the US policy of maintaining the facade of Laotian neutrality had prevented Washington approval of any cross-border operations into Laos.⁶⁹

In March 1965, COMUSMACV submitted to CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff a concept for cross-border operations into Laos developed by his Studies and Observation Group (MACSOG). The concept was designed to gain better intelligence on the infiltration routes and to interdict them more effectively. The concept provided for an expansion of operations in three phases, beginning with "short-stay," tactical intelligence missions, progressing to "longer-stay" intelligence/sabotage missions, and culminating in long-duration missions to develop resistance cadres, utilizing secure base areas in Laos and SVN. These operations would be carried out by RVNAF teams advised and supported by US personnel as feasible. A Southeast Asia Coordinating Committee (SEACORD) meeting in Saigon in April agreed that Phase I (the "short-stay," tactical intelligence missions) could be initiated subject to certain limitations recommended by the US Ambassador in Vientiane. Ambassador Sullivan desired that the missions accompanied by US advisors be restricted to the two southernmost operational areas, with penetrations limited to 20 km and to periods of not longer than ten days. Finally, the Ambassador would agree to US advisors accompanying the RVNAF teams only if infiltrated overland rather than by air.⁷⁰

The Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded COMUSMACV's concept to the Secretary of Defense on 18 June 1965, recommending its approval, in principle, for further planning, training, and discussion with the RVNAF. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also recommended approval of Phase I for implementation subject to the time and geographical restrictions on the use of US advisors as proposed by Ambassador Sullivan. They found Ambassador Sullivan's limitation of the air introduction of

69. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/601, 7 Jun 65, JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65).

70. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 27 Mar 65, JCS IN 90676; (TS-GP 2) Msg, Vientiane to COMUSMACV, 23 May 65, JCS IN 27033; JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65).

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US advisors unacceptable, and they recommended that unless this limitation was removed, there be no further consideration of the program. If the concept was adopted, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested appropriate funding from DOD contingency funds. The Joint Chiefs of Staff discounted the political risks of these cross-border operations, stating that the current period of increased overt US involvement in SVN and Laos had largely eliminated the need for maintaining "the facade of compliance" with the Geneva Accords.⁷¹

After submission of the concept to the Secretary of Defense, Ambassador Sullivan visited Washington. He met with representatives of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) on 23 July 1965 and clarified his position on cross-border operations. He still requested that the initial introduction of teams with US advisors be by ground infiltration, but he agreed that subsequent resupply, reinforcement, or evacuation could be by air. He also accepted elimination of the ten-day restriction on length of stay, and agreed that air strikes on possible targets be flown as approved and conducted through the BANGO alert system (US aircraft on strip alert in Thailand) so long as they did not include strike aircraft from SVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff found these modified restrictions acceptable, and on 7 August they requested Secretary of Defense approval and funding of the concept of Laotian cross-border operations subject to Ambassador Sullivan's revised restrictions.⁷²

Action was not immediately forthcoming, and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed the Secretary of Defense on 8 September that he was "increasingly concerned" over the long delay. General Wheeler stated that the military needed better intelligence on the infiltration routes in Laos and more effective interdiction of them. He felt that COMUSMACV's concept as supported by the Joint Chiefs of Staff could make "an important contribution" to the effort in Vietnam. He requested the Secretary of Defense to support action for "a clear-cut decision" on the entire issue, adding that, in the event of a negative from State, he was inclined "to go further up the chain."⁷³

71. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-475-65 to SecDef, 18 Jun 65 (derived from JCS 2343/601), same file.

72. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-611-65 to SecDef, 7 Aug 65 (derived from JCS 2343/601-1), same file.

73. (TS-GP 1) CM-831-65 to SecDef, 8 Sep 65, Encl to JCS 2343/601-2, 10 Sep 65, same file.

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On 18 September, six weeks after the Joint Chiefs of Staff request, the Secretary of Defense approved in principle the overall concept for cross-border operations into Laos, and authorized implementation of Phase I, subject to the limitations of Ambassador Sullivan and to the restriction of operations to the two southernmost areas (Dak To and Dak Prou) with penetrations limited to 20 km. The Secretary of Defense requested that he be informed 48 hours in advance of the intention to launch operations and be furnished appropriate progress and final reports. He also made provision for the necessary funding. The Joint Chiefs of Staff passed this authorization for cross-border operations into Laos on to CINCPAC, assigning the operations the name SHINING BRASS. The Joint Chiefs of Staff told CINCPAC that, based on favorable operational experience with Phase I operations and on his future recommendations, they would seek authority for expansion of SHINING BRASS consistent with the original COMUSMACV concept.⁷⁴

Rules of Engagement - Southeast Asia

At the beginning of 1965, the general rules of engagement in effect for US forces operating in Southeast Asia dated from August and September 1964. These rules authorized US forces to attack and destroy any hostile vessel or aircraft which attacked or gave positive indication of intent to attack US forces in RVN, Thailand, and Laos, their territorial seas and internal waters as well as adjacent international waters. Hot pursuit was authorized into NVN, Cambodia, RVN and Thailand, although no such authority existed with regard to Communist China. The US military commander was armed with an omnibus authority for emergency which allowed him to defend against unprovoked armed attack with immediate aggressive action, using any means at his command.⁷⁵

Additional rules were applied for Laos and for most special operations and projects such as YANKEE TEAM and destroyer operations in the Tonkin Gulf.

74. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 18 Sep 65, Encl to JCS 2343/601-3, 20 Sep 65; (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS and SecN, 14 Oct 65, Encl to JCS 2343/601, 18 Oct 65; same file.

75. (~~TS~~) J-3, TP-4-65, on JCS 2339/171, JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65).

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As it became apparent that US military involvement in southeast Asia would grow, possibly leading to situations where US forces might need more leeway to operate, the Joint Chiefs of Staff took steps to revise these rules of engagement. The first initiative came from CINCPAC who, on 6 January, warned that a recent incident in the South China Sea, in which unidentified craft had been detected approaching the Hue/Da Nang area, heightened the need to make these rules clearer and more precise. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that substantive changes to existing rules were needed to protect friendly forces in international waters and to provide for stronger action by US forces if attacked by Communist Chinese planes.⁷⁶

On 16 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted to the Secretary of Defense proposed revised rules of engagement for Southeast Asia. These were actually a clarification and consolidation of existing rules, with the addition of certain provisions necessary to protect friendly forces in international waters and to allow "immediate pursuit" into Communist China. They had replaced the term "hot pursuit", used earlier, with the term "immediate pursuit" to standardize terms among approved plans for various theaters and because "immediate pursuit" differed in certain key aspects from "hot pursuit" as defined in international law. Immediate pursuit must be continuous and uninterrupted and could be extended as far as necessary and feasible in the areas described. The operative wording, insofar as pursuit into Chinese territory was concerned, stated that no pursuit was authorized "... into territorial seas or air space of Communist China except in response to attack upon US forces by forces which can reasonably be established as CHICOM." The Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary that they wanted this new feature introduced because it was essential to prevent the creation of a sanctuary for "forces making such an attack"; it was also essential to an effective military presence in Southeast Asia as well as to US national dignity.

With regard to the special rules of engagement for operations such as BARRELL ROLL, there was no intent to modify either the procedure for setting up special rules for such missions on a case-by-case basis or to modify existing special rules.⁷⁷

⁷⁶. Ibid.

⁷⁷. (S-GP 3) JCSM-118-65 to SecDef, 16 Feb 65 (derived from JCS 2339/171), JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65).

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In its other aspects the proposed new set of rules made a real effort to define more exactly geographic areas and such terms as "hostile" and "friendly" in order to remove some of the confusion that, because of omissions and imprecision, marked the current rules.

Before the Secretary of Defense acted on this proposal, ROLLING THUNDER had been underway for a month, the first SAM site had been discovered in NVN, and the President had approved commitment of US forces to ground combat in RVN.

In the end the Secretary refused to go along with the "immediate pursuit" (which he equated with "hot" pursuit) into Communist China. On 12 April he notified the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he believed hot pursuit should be allowed if significant, clearly intentional Chinese intervention took place. "However," he said, "since the implications of hot pursuit are likely to be so major, I believe that there should be no revision of present rules in this connection at this time." He told them he was ready to discuss it with the President later if circumstances dictated.

Whereas the earlier rules had stated a three-mile limit for territorial waters, the Secretary changed this limit to 12 miles. "I recognize your concern over the apparent recognition of a twelve-mile territorial limit but, solely for the purpose of these rules, I believe it is not desirable to bring these claims to issue with State now," the Secretary stated. He believed that the 12-mile rule would restrict only the area in which US ships might be operationally deployed, not immediate pursuit.

Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff had designated Cambodian aircraft as "hostile" if found over RVN or Laos, the Secretary pointed out that the United States had traditionally treated Cambodian forces less severely than communist bloc forces. Consequently, the Secretary deleted Cambodian aircraft from the definition of "hostile aircraft." With these exceptions he approved the rules of engagement proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁷⁸

78. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 12 Apr 65, Att to JCS 2339/171-1, 14 Apr 65, JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65).

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Upon receipt of Mr. McNamara's memorandum, J-3 was quick to point out to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the claim that the 12-mile figure would not restrict hot pursuit was not entirely correct. Since territorial air space was defined with respect to territorial waters and immediate pursuit was not authorized either into CHICOM air or territorial waters, it could well impose significant restrictions on US operations under current circumstances, particularly in the area of Hainan Island. The Secretary was actually reflecting a de facto recognition of a claimed 12-mile territorial sea which the United States had not legally recognized. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, to preclude delay, did not reclama the Secretary's amendments but sent the revised rules of engagement to CINCPAC on 17 April. They informed him that they were seeking "further consideration" of the decision with respect to immediate pursuit into Communist China.⁷⁹

The new rules defined "hostile aircraft" in the air space of RVN or Thailand or over international waters. In order to include NVN as an area in which the definition of "hostile aircraft" would apply, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 26 May amended the geographical definition to cover all of Southeast Asia except Cambodia and Laos. Laos was covered by separate provisions.⁸⁰

The Cambodian Border Problem

Increasingly in the early months of 1965 the VC had made use of Cambodia as a base of operations for forays into RVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that this sanctuary should be denied the enemy to the extent possible and had recommended in April that the prohibitions on hot pursuit by the RVNAF of VC into Cambodia be modified to allow "appropriate response" under certain conditions. Although the Secretary of Defense agreed "in principle" the State Department was opposed to this relaxation of the rules because of the political situation at the time. As a result, in the second week of May the recommendation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was disapproved.⁸¹

79. (TS-GP 3) J-3 TP-20-65, on JCS 2339/171-1, 14 Apr 65; JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65). (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9294 to CINCPAC, 17 Apr 65; 17 Apr 65; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9295 to CINCPAC, 17 Apr 65.

80. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2838 to CINCPAC, 26 May 65.

81. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 1941 to CINCPAC, 12 May 65.

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In the latter part of 1965, US military authorities, both in Washington and in the field, grew increasingly dissatisfied with the restrictions on actions against the VC operating in Cambodian territory. The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense on 12 November 1965 that there was "strong evidence" indicating that the VC were using Cambodia as a logistics and communications base, a sanctuary, and a staging and transit area for operations in South Vietnam. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that, despite the political risk of antagonizing Prince Sihanouk, forceful action must be taken to stop this abuse, and they proposed a series of military actions to this end. They recommended expanded and intensified overall intelligence collection in Cambodia, low-altitude aerial reconnaissance over Cambodia, increased surveillance of sea LOCs between RVN and Cambodia, and increased patrols on the Mekong and Bassac waterways. They also proposed paramilitary operations into Cambodia to reduce VC infiltration into SVN, and authorization for GVN/US operations into Cambodia in immediate pursuit of VC forces. In the political sphere, the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggested action to persuade the Government of Cambodia to cease support of the VC and the enlistment of third country pressure on Sihanouk to halt this support. For future consideration, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended military operations to prevent maritime shipping carrying contraband goods into Cambodia and overt air and/or ground cross-border operations into Cambodia against confirmed LOCs and facilities supporting the VC.⁸²

On 18 November, as operations in the Ia Drang valley, SILVER BAYONET, were drawing toward a close, CINCPAC pointed out to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that US ground forces were heavily engaged with the NVA near the Cambodian border. Since it was likely that the enemy would break contact and flee into sanctuary in Cambodia, CINCPAC requested authority to conduct "immediate pursuit" of the enemy on the ground across the border. In CINCPAC's view, Cambodia had forfeited her neutral status by providing a haven for the enemy and the United States was entitled to protect its own security by pursuing and destroying its enemies there. If actual pursuit was turned down by higher authority, CINCPAC asked that, "as a lesser pressure," US artillery be allowed to fire into Cambodia at maximum range, pursuing the enemy by fire.⁸³

82. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-812-65 to SecDef, 12 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2366/7-1), JMF 9155.1 (14 Oct 65).

83. (TS-GP 3) CINCPAC to JCS, 182315Z Nov 65, JCS IN 58241.

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On 21 November the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized US forces engaged in SILVER BAYONET to take the necessary counteractions to defend themselves against enemy attacks directed from Cambodia. These would include returning fire and maneuvering as necessary into Cambodia while actually engaged and in contact with the VC/NVA. The use of supporting artillery and close air support was included in this authorization. The Joint Chiefs of Staff specified that no air or artillery strikes would be made against populated areas, nor would base areas of the NVA/VC be attacked "other than in circumstances justified by self-defense in terms of continuing engagement and direct threat to US/RVNAF forces."⁸⁴

On 9 December COMUSMACV informed CINCPAC that it was perfectly clear the enemy was building in Cambodia a base of operations against the RVN in the same manner as had been done earlier in Laos. He called for firm rules of engagement to include authority for: US forces to strike with air and artillery against enemy weapons firing from the Cambodian border against US troops to a distance not to exceed 10 km into Cambodia; ground troops, when engaged with an enemy on or near the border, to maneuver into Cambodia for at least 2 km; US planes to fly observation and fire direction missions within a ten-mile strip of the border; and ground reconnaissance elements to operate to a depth of 5 km on the Cambodia side. Ambassador Lodge concurred with General Westmoreland's recommendations.⁸⁵

Washington concurred with COMUSMACV's evaluation of the situation and promised that, in cases similar to SILVER BAYONET, "similar authorization will be extended promptly from Washington," but State and Defense officials did not judge it wise to extend advance approval for the type of action that General Westmoreland wished to take against the enemy in Cambodia. Consequently, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized US forces, in emergency situations only, to take necessary counteractions in self-defense against VC/NVA attacks from Cambodian territory, but retained approval authority in Washington for nonemergency maneuver operations and return of fire into Cambodia. An emergency situation

84. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 6900 to CINCPAC, 21 Nov 65.

85. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 43199 to CINCPAC, 9 Dec 65, JCS IN 89195.

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was considered to exist when, in the judgment of the Commander, the urgency for timely counteractions in self-defense precluded obtaining prior approval.⁸⁶

After discussions with the Department of State on the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommendations of 12 November for military actions against the VC in Cambodia, the Secretary of Defense informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 29 December that there had been "substantial agreement" that US policy toward Cambodia should seek to deny Cambodian territory for the support of the VC, but would continue to recognize Cambodian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Therefore the Secretary of Defense did not intend to seek a policy decision for the conduct of paramilitary or low-level aerial reconnaissance operations in or over Cambodia, or for authority for immediate pursuit beyond that already granted. With regard to the expansion and intensification of overall intelligence collection, the Secretary of Defense had proposed that the Secretary of State join with him in requesting the Director of Central Intelligence to develop and plan for a more effective intelligence effort in Cambodia. The Secretary of Defense did authorize the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in coordination with the Department of State, to take the necessary action to improve surveillance of the sea LOCs between RVN and Cambodia and to strengthen controls on the Mekong and Bassac waterways, but without violating the Cambodian border, territorial waters, or legitimate rights of navigation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff subsequently drew up and the Secretary of Defense approved an appropriate plan to accomplish these actions.⁸⁷

OPLAN 34A

The covert operations under OPLAN 34A that had been mounted against NVN since 1964 continued during 1965. The approval for the last four increments, Package One, that had been granted in February was followed by other actions aimed at expanding these operations. On 2 April the Joint Chiefs

86. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Jt State-Def Msg to Saigon, et al., 112319Z Dec 65, JCS IN 92758. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8706 to CINCPAC, 15 Dec 65, JMF 9155.1 (15 Dec 65).

87. (~~TS~~-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 29 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2366/7-2, 10 Jan 66; (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-141-66 to SecDef, 3 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2366/7-4); (~~TS~~-GP 4) Jt State-Def Msg, DEF 6606 to Saigon et al., 22 Mar 66; JMF 9155.1 (14 Oct 65).

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of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that a request by CINCPAC to use US submarines and US-manned C-130s in OPLAN 34A operations be approved. However, the proposed actions were disapproved by the Secretary of State.⁸⁸

As a follow-on to increments 1 through 8, Package One, COMUSMACV submitted in April proposed additional increments 9 through 12, all involving maritime actions against NVN. These covered a wide range of actions from bombardment by PTFs to psychological operations, including an amphibious raid on Ile du Tigre.

CINCPAC, however, recommended that bombardment missions by PTFs not be carried out. He wanted these craft to concentrate on interdiction of sea infiltration and to continue to execute limited missions, less bombardments, north of the 17th Parallel. As a result, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense increments 9 through 11 only, calling for reconnaissance and infiltration actions, an amphibious raid, and coastal harassment missions. These were approved on 21 June.⁸⁹

Later in the year CINCPAC recommended and the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved an extension of these maritime operations up to the 20th Parallel.⁹⁰

Earlier on 16 May, CINCPAC had recommended that the OPLAN 34A PTFs be used to stop, search, and harass NVN shipping north of the 17th Parallel. This was in effect an extension of the program of junk capture missions on which the PTFs had been used. Admiral Sharp proposed that US Navy advisors be aboard the PTFs and that air forces provide close support if the PTFs came under hostile attack beyond their capability to repel. The US advisors would wear civilian clothing but carry US identification. Because the original guidance for OPLAN 34A required that the actions be covert and plausibly

88. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-231-65 to SecDef, 2 Apr 65, (derived from JCS 2343/555); (TS-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 5 Jun 65; 1st N/H of JCS 2343/555, JMF 9155.3 (20 Mar 65).

89. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/516-1, 2 Jun 65, JMF 9155.3 (15 Jan 65). (TS-GP 1) M5g, JCS 4303 to CINCPAC, 21 Jun 65.

90. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-791-65, 1 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2343/702); (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 29 Nov 65.

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deniable by the US Government, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ruled against placing the US Navy advisors aboard the PTFs. In other respects they agreed with CINCPAC and in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 3 July recommended approval of the employment of the PTF craft as CINCPAC had proposed between the 17th and 19th Parallels but excluding US Navy advisors. Approval was granted by Deputy Secretary Vance on 28 July.91

Psychological operations against NVN under OPLAN 34A had long included the dissemination of propaganda materials such as leaflets, radios, and gift kits by air. These had been dropped from C-123 aircraft which, because of their vulnerability to NVN AAA, had been restricted to sparsely populated, lightly defended areas of NVN. By relying on wind-drift, leaflets could be spread over a wide area. The technique did not allow "tactical leaflets" to be dropped on specifically selected targets. Nor could radios and gift kits be widely disseminated. Consequently COMUSMACV and CINCPAC proposed using the faster and less vulnerable A1G aircraft for these operations, thus achieving greater accuracy directly on specific population centers. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 12 October that this employment be approved. On 25 October the Joint Chiefs of Staff were informed that Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance had approved additional OPLAN 34A missions employing the A1G.92

 Under existing directives CINCPAC was required to submit his proposed air missions as a package periodically to be approved at the Washington level. Once carried out an individual mission could not be repeated

91. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/611, 25 Jun 65 and JCSM-525-65, 3 Jul 65, derived therefrom. JMF 9155.3 (15 May 65). (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 28 Jul 65, Att to JCS 2343/611-1, JMF 9155.3 (15 May 65).

92. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-746-65 to SecDef, 12 Oct 65 (derived from JCS 2343/691); (TS-GP 1) Memo, CDR C.A.H. Trost, Mil Asst to DepSecDef, to SACSA, 25 Oct 65, JMG 9155.3 (26 Aug 65).

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without reapproval in Washington. CINCPAC believed that it would improve his operations significantly if he could be delegated authority to approve in the theater OPLAN 34A operations "in support of mission concepts and objectives that have been approved at the Washington level." The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed. In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 20 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that CINCPAC be granted the authority he sought, although the approval of new concepts and/or mission objectives would continue to rest with them or with higher authority. Deputy Secretary Vance granted his approval of this recommendation on 15 February 1966.⁹³

⁹³. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-893-65 to SecDef, 20 Dec 65 (derived from JCS 2343/730); (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 15 Feb 65, Att to JCS 2343/730-1; JMF 9155.3 (9 Nov 65).

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Chapter 25

ROLLING THUNDER CONTINUES

The closely controlled program of air strikes against NVN, begun on 2 March, continued throughout 1965. The intensity of this program, ROLLING THUNDER, entailing US carrier-based and land-based aircraft with some participation by the VNAF, rose much more slowly than the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the field commanders wished or believed necessary. In terms of targets struck, areas brought under armed reconnaissance, methods of attack, and weight of effort, reality lagged far behind the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff under the damping influence of other Presidential advisors who urged a more cautious, and in the JCS view, less productive, approach. Because during the year the enemy acquired from the Soviet Union sophisticated air defense systems, the threat to US forces operating over RVN soon became an integral part of the ROLLING THUNDER planning and a matter of continuing concern to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Procedures for Development of ROLLING THUNDER Package

Each numbered ROLLING THUNDER package, eventually sent to CINCPAC as an execute order, set forth in detail the targets to be struck, set limits on the timing and weight of effort, delineated the areas in which specified operations could take place, and in other respects precisely delimited operational aspects. The general procedure for development of these numbered packages involved initial guidance to the Joint Staff (J-3), by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, in terms of what the Joint Chiefs of Staff felt should be included.

In addition, the recommendations by CINCPAC for each package were carefully considered. The DIA furnished target information and evaluations to further assist the J-3.

After the initial draft planning message had been developed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were briefed by action officers and appropriate revisions were made. Revisions made at this juncture usually reflected JCS judgment on what

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higher authority would or would not accept. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, then discussed, usually on Saturday, the revised draft planning message with the Secretary of Defense, whose own staff had meanwhile been made aware of the features embodied in the draft message. It was at this stage, in coordination between the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) and counterpart officials in the State Department, that the views and influence of these agencies were brought to bear. Substantive changes to the original JCS proposals were the rule rather than the exception, with both State and DOD officials, and on occasion the President's personal staff, prompting changes in targets, areas, timing, and procedures. Invariably such changes were in the direction of softening the impact of the bombing program on NVN. The final step in approval of the numbered package involved its presentation to the President by the Secretary of Defense, usually at luncheon on Tuesday, and in the presence of such highly placed Presidential advisors as Mr. Bundy, Mr. Rostow, and the Secretary of State. The President approved each ROLLING THUNDER package before the execute message was sent by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to CINCPAC. CINCPAC was responsible for recommending to the Joint Chiefs of Staff optimum targets for all ROLLING THUNDER packages. For this purpose he maintained in his headquarters a Target Planning Group composed of intelligence and operations personnel from his staff and from the staffs of his component commanders. The group produced a target list and armed reconnaissance proposals which were then considered by CINCPAC's ROLLING THUNDER Planning Group, chaired by his Chief of Staff. CINCPAC's final recommendations were submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff eleven days prior to the effective execution date of each ROLLING THUNDER package. Within the information developed for fixed targets were estimates of civilian casualties that would be caused by particular strikes.¹

Any of the individual members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who wished could have an observer present with the Joint Staff group which developed the weekly package. On 10 May the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, instructed the Joint Staff to flag for his attention any proposed target or proposed usage of forces that had not previously been considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This was "to provide opportunity for the Joint Chiefs of

1. (13-GP 3) Armed Reconnaissance Study, Nov 65, Ann D, OCJCS Bulky File, 091 Vietnam Nov 66.

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Staff to exercise judgment in the targeting and the manner of employing our forces for the strikes against North Viet-Nam ..."²

In spite of the inhibitions placed upon ROLLING THUNDER, the areas authorized for attack in NVN were gradually expanded northward and westward, the number of sorties in a given period was raised, and the value of targets struck rose at year's end. There was a perceptible increase in both the scope and effectiveness of ROLLING THUNDER as compared to the first efforts made in the Spring of 1965.

RT 9 - RT 12 - Interdiction of LOCs

In approving NSAM 328 on 1-2 April the President decreed that the United States should continue roughly the present slowly ascending tempo of ROLLING THUNDER operations, being prepared to add strikes in response to a higher rate of VC operations, or conceivably, to slow the pace in the unlikely event VC activity slacked off sharply for more than a brief period. The United States would, in other words, react to any enemy initiative as appropriate.³

The President also forecast at least part of the shape ROLLING THUNDER would take, saying, "We should continue to vary the types of targets, stepping up attack on lines of communications in the near future, and possibly moving in a few weeks to attacks on the rail lines north and northeast of Hanoi."⁴

Starting with RT 9 on 2 April and continuing through RT 12, which ended on 29 April, operations against NVN were specifically directed at interdicting NVN LOCs into Laos and RVN. The general objective of this campaign was to increase the difficulty and cost to the enemy of sustaining his infiltration to the south and to degrade his capabilities of overt aggression. It was to be achieved by preplanned strikes against bridges and ferries and by armed reconnaissance against railroad rolling stock, trucks, and NVN shipping. During this campaign CINCPAC was authorized to attack either by day or night, in contrast to an earlier restriction to attack only by day. The number

2. (S-GP 3) CM-604-65 to D/JS, 10 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65.

3. (S-GP 1) NSAM No. 328, to Sec State, Sec Def, and DCI, 6 Apr 65, Encl to JCS 2343/566, 7 Apr 65 JMF 9155.3 (6 Apr 65).

4. Ibid.

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of strike sorties authorized was fixed at 24 per calendar day. Attacks on the Ile du Tigre were authorized in this period.⁵

In RT 12 CINCPAC was authorized six sorties in excess of the 24 sortie limit when necessary to destroy trucks or railroad rolling stock. The State Department had been reluctant to grant this relatively small expansion of authority. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, asked Admiral Sharp to send him, each time that he invoked "this permissive commitment of additional air resources," an evaluation for the Secretary of Defense of the actual worth of the target as demonstrated by results achieved.⁶

In RT 9 through RT 12, 26 bridges and seven ferries were struck.⁷

During the Honolulu Conference on 19-20 April, Secretary McNamara, General Wheeler, Ambassador Taylor, Admiral Sharp, General Westmoreland, Mr. William Bundy, and Mr. McNaughton discussed the ROLLING THUNDER program. On 20 April Secretary McNamara reported to the President that all had agreed that the present tempo was about right and that sufficient increasing pressure was being provided by "repetition and continuation." He stated that all of them envisioned a strike program continuing at least six months and perhaps a year or more, with the Hanoi-Haiphong-Phuc Yen areas being avoided during that period. "There might be fewer fixed strikes, or more restrikes, or more armed reconnaissance missions," he informed the President. Ambassador Taylor had observed that it was important not to "kill the hostage" by bombing inside the "Hanoi do-nut." All the conferees, Secretary McNamara advised the President, considered ROLLING THUNDER essential to the US campaign, both psychologically and physically, but did not believe that it could "do the job alone."⁸

5. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 8134 to CINCPAC, 31 Mar 65; JCS 8554, 7 Apr 65; JCS 9006, 13 Apr 65; JCS 9451, 20 Apr 65.

6. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1433-65 to CINCPAC, 22 Apr 65.

7. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) Institute for Defense Analyses Study, "The Effects of U.S. Bombing on North Vietnam's Ability to Support Military Operations in South Vietnam and Laos: Retrospect and Prospect," 29 Aug 66 /hereafter cited as JASON SUMMER STUDY/, OCJCS Bulky File, 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

8. (TS) Memo, SecDef to Pres, 21 Apr 65, OCJCS File 337, Honolulu Conference, Apr 65.

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By the end of April, 60 of the JCS-designated targets in NVN had been struck, 43 by US planes and 17 by planes of the VNAF. Eighty-six armed reconnaissance missions had been flown against LOCs, targets of opportunity, and coastal shipping. The CJCS, addressing himself to the LOC interdiction campaign, informed the Secretary of Defense that the NVN problems in providing logistic support to the southern portion of NVN had been magnified and that the enemy's ability to support any major offensive beyond his own borders in Laos or RVN had been "degraded."⁹

RT 13 - RT 14

In the ensuing several months emphasis shifted to attacks on fixed targets having military value. In addition to the bridges, barracks, and ammunition depots, the President authorized strikes against power plants, supply depots, ammunition factories, locks, and POL installations and facilities, specifying clearly, however, that strikes on population centers would be avoided. At the same time, armed reconnaissance areas were expanded and stepped up attacks made against radar sites, land and water vehicular traffic, bivouac areas, and maintenance facilities. LOCs were cratered, and chokepoints seeded. In this same period a gradual, but slight modification of restrictions and of operational methods and procedures became apparent and the limits on sorties were raised.

Before RT 13, which began on 30 April, armed reconnaissance had been limited to specific segments of designated routes. But beginning with RT 13 armed reconnaissance was authorized by a more broadly defined geographical area, in this instance the area of NVN south of the 20° N latitude. In addition the sortie limit was raised to 40 per calendar day with a maximum of 200 for the seven day period.¹⁰

Secretary McNamara, during a conference with General Wheeler on RT 13, stated that he believed that CINCPAC had consistently exceeded the number of sorties authorized since the beginning of ROLLING THUNDER. General Wheeler pointed out that newspaper accounts of the bombings made no distinction between actual strike sorties and other sorties carried out in

9. (TS) CM-616-65 to SecDef, 17 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65.

10. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9990 to CINCPAC, 29 Apr 65.

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support of the strikes, for example, Combat Air Patrol (CAP), Search and Rescue (SAR), and flak suppression. The Secretary agreed but insisted he was talking about strike sorties. Actually, the number of sorties specified in the RT orders were considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to be "advisory" only. CINCPAC and his component commanders established the actual strike magnitude, which was monitored by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in order to insure an adequate weight of effort. Nevertheless, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, asked the Director, Joint Staff to assemble data comparing the authorized figures with those reported from the field for the last two RT programs. When compiled these data showed that of 474 sorties authorized on fixed targets, CINCPAC's forces had flown 316, and of 264 authorized on armed reconnaissance they had flown 249.¹¹

Temporary Suspension

On 10 May 1965 President Johnson informed Ambassador Taylor that he had decided to suspend ROLLING THUNDER operations for about a week as a means of swinging world opinion in favor of the United States and "to begin to clear a path either toward restoration of peace or toward increased military action, depending upon the reaction of the Communists."¹²

Various efforts were made to contact officials of the NVN in order to apprise them that the United States would watch very closely to see if the bombing pause were accompanied by any significant reductions in NVN support of the VC, but these efforts appear to have been unsuccessful. At any rate, although ROLLING THUNDER operations were suspended effective 2400 hours, 12 May, Saigon time, and an intensive reconnaissance conducted, no reduction in NVN support of the VC was detected. Consequently, the President authorized resumption of ROLLING THUNDER at 0600 on 18 May, ending a five day suspension. Secretary of State Rusk announced, "In view of the complete absence of any constructive response, we have decided the bombing must be resumed."¹³

11. (S) CM-568-65 to D/JS, 26 Apr 65; (S) Summary, ROLLING THUNDER 11 and 12 (To Date), 26 Apr 65, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 2, ROLLING THUNDER 13, 30 Apr-6 May 65.

12. (TS) Msg, State 2553 to Saigon, 10 May 65. No evidence has been found in available records to indicate that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were consulted prior to this Presidential decision.

13. (TS) Msg, State 3103 to Moscow, 11 May 65; (S-NODIS) Msg, State 2425 to New Delhi et al., 18 May 65.

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CINCPAC Proposes Changes

In mid-May Admiral Sharp warned against underestimating the cumulative effects of ROLLING THUNDER, and at the same time challenged the view that few worthwhile targets remained south of the 20th Parallel. He pointed out that of the four major barrack complexes attacked, about two-thirds of the buildings remained undamaged. Three major ammunition depots had been struck but only 40 percent of the ammunition storage and 56 percent of the depot support buildings had been destroyed or damaged. 46 percent of the known buildings in the two major support depot complexes attacked had not been hit. The surface had barely been scratched in strikes against NVN shipping and port facilities and a significant part of the enemy's bridge and ferry system was still intact. New staging areas, and refueling areas had not yet been attacked.¹⁴

CINCPAC proposed an around-the-clock program of strikes to be conducted in increments by small numbers of planes making repeated strikes. These missions would include armed reconnaissance of land and waterway routes, route interdiction, restrikes on still lucrative military targets, destruction of dispersed supplies, equipment, and military personnel, and attacks on ports and recognized NVN shipping. He recommended also that the regularly programmed large-scale attacks be continued to inflict damage on an incremental basis rather than attempting to inflict maximum damage in one day. Initially, strikes would be limited to the area south of 20° N, but subsequent strikes would be made against major military supply and ammunition depots and barracks northwestward from the 20th Parallel.¹⁵

The Joint Chiefs of Staff generally agreed with the concept sent them by CINCPAC. But they felt that in order to put his ideas into effect, changes in the current concept of operations would have to be made. These would involve giving CINCPAC greater authority to plan strikes and restrikes as the situation dictated. On 22 May 1965 they proposed in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense that CINCPAC be given such authority. In a draft message that they proposed be sent to CINCPAC they embodied instructions that would have had him prepare a weekly plan of operations for submission to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

14. (78-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 120314Z May 65, JCS IN 55813.

15. Ibid.

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The draft set the weekly sortie rate at 400, and in general gave him a freer hand.¹⁶

The Secretary of Defense took a whole month to disapprove the CINCPAC views and the JCS recommendations. On 22 June he told the Chairman:

I am aware of no serious defects in the present method of planning ROLLING THUNDER operations. The proposed programs are worked out with close coordination between COMUSMACV, CINCPAC and the JCS. The operations are militarily effective and are managed in such a way as to permit political considerations to be taken into account on a timely basis. Accordingly, I doubt that, at this time, a change in our method of planning ROLLING THUNDER operations would be desirable.¹⁷

Ambassador Taylor's Proposed ROLLING THUNDER Tactics

At about the same time that CINCPAC was giving the Joint Chiefs of Staff his concept for future ROLLING THUNDER operations, General Taylor also proposed a change in strike tactics over NVN. On 13 May, he suggested to Secretary Rusk that consideration be given to varying the ROLLING THUNDER apparent standard pattern of "virtually daily strikes." The Ambassador believed that a more random pattern would have a greater psychological effect on the DRV. He suggested a period of a few days during which there would be no attacks, followed by a day of concentrated strikes over a wide area, and then small attacks. It seemed to him and to the Embassy Staff that this tactic would accentuate for Hanoi the "tensions, stresses and strains" of the entire bombing program.

Admiral Sharp quickly went on record as opposed to Ambassador Taylor's suggestion. In a cable to the Joint Chiefs of Staff he explained that there already were sufficient variables in operating methods. Moreover, he believed that the

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16. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-404-65 to SecDef, 22 May 65, Encl A to JCS 2343/597-1, 22 May 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 May 65).
17. (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 22 Jun 65, Att to JCS 2343/597-2, 22 Jun 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 May 65).

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concept he had just submitted, if approved, would result in maximum psychological impact on NVN. The Ambassador's proposal was not adopted.¹⁸

ROLLING THUNDER Moves North - RT 15 - RT 28/29

ROLLING THUNDER strikes were moved north of 20° N for the first time in RT 15. On 17 May the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed CINCPAC to strike the Quang Suoi Barracks near Ninh Binh but not to do so prior to 19 May. The target was hit on 22 May.¹⁹

When General Wheeler cleared the planning message for RT 16 with the Secretary of Defense on 16 May he tried to increase the number of armed reconnaissance sorties but was unsuccessful, the Secretary specifying 285 sorties over the ten day period. The Secretary told the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff that CINCPAC had not yet equaled or exceeded the number of armed reconnaissance sorties during a given ROLLING THUNDER period. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, told CINCPAC that "if you approach the specified upper limit, he will seek to have your authorization for armed recce sorties increased."²⁰

During RT 16, which took place between 25 May and 3 June, and covered ten strike days as opposed to the usual seven, CINCPAC was authorized to attack with relatively small strike elements in a series of attacks spread over the period until the desired damage levels to fixed targets had been achieved. This was done to reduce the risk involved in going against targets believed to be heavily defended. While MIG CAP and screening aircraft were authorized to protect the strike force, they were enjoined not to attack air bases supporting hostile aircraft. They could, however, engage in air to air combat.²¹

18. (TS) Msg, Saigon 3753 to State, 131033Z May 65, JCS IN 48675; (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS 140351Z May 65, JCS IN 59404.

19. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2230 to CINCPAC, 17 May 65. (S-NOFORN) NMCC OPSUM, 22 May 65.

20. (TS) Msg, JCS 1836-65 to CINCPAC, 19 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65.

21. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2672 to CINCPAC, 22 May 65.

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In RT 17 emphasis was placed on armed reconnaissance of routes emanating from Vinh with sufficient repetitive attacks to insure proper interdiction of the LOCs. SAM sites were explicitly excluded as targets. A new feature was added in RT 18 when CINCPAC, at his request, was authorized to conduct armed reconnaissance; small and precise attacks during daytime against prebriefed military targets not in the Joint Chiefs of Staff target list; and, thereafter, armed route reconnaissance with residual ordnance.²²

US air strikes moved north of 21° N on 15 June in RT 19 when a military complex and an ammo depot above that line were taken under attack. RT 19, RT 20, and RT 21 listed a total of 24 fixed targets, including seven to be restruck. Among these latter were the airfields at Dong Hoi and Vinh which were being reconstructed by the enemy. The number of weekly sorties was raised in RT 21 from 200 per week to 250 per week with the weight of effort and timing to be at the discretion of CINCPAC. In all of these periods CINCPAC's request for additional armed reconnaissance sorties were granted when it appeared necessary to higher authority.²³

Each of these programs authorized a slightly larger armed reconnaissance area until, in RT 21, the area was extended to the Laotian border in the northwest. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had on several occasions proposed the use of naval forces to harass the Ile du Tigre within the framework of the ROLLING THUNDER program. They again proposed this action in their planning message for RT 21 but it was turned down since some higher authorities considered it would represent an escalation of the war.²⁴

Although its participation was an important element of ROLLING THUNDER, in view of the need for the program to be a combined effort, the VNAF was hard pressed to mount the few strikes assigned to it in southern NVN. Increasing need for its services in RVN in response to growing VC activity severely reduced VNAF resources available for ROLLING THUNDER. By June CINCPAC believed some measure was necessary to assure

22. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 3263 to CINCPAC, 2 Jun 65; JCS 3552, 8 Jun 65. See Ch 26 for details of the SAM threat and its effect on ROLLING THUNDER.

23. (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 3944 to CINCPAC, 15 Jun 65; JCS 4494, 24 Jun 65; JCS 4801, 29 Jun 65.

24. Ibid.

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continued VNAF participation in air actions against the north, and by arrangement with COMUSMACV and the RVNAF high command it was agreed that the VNAF would provide a modest three strike/reconnaissance missions (24 sorties) for each of the ROLLING THUNDER periods.²⁵

On 11 June, in connection with important recommendations for deployment of forces, the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned the Secretary of Defense that there were significant indications that the Communists might be on the verge of moving the war in Southeast Asia to a new level of intensity. The Soviet deployment of more jet fighters, some light bombers, and SA-2s to NVN showed a Communist decision to "add a new dimension to the situation in Southeast Asia." They proposed therefore, among other actions, that the air war against NVN be intensified to include increased armed reconnaissance sorties against the LOCs and strikes against militarily important targets. This was necessary, said the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to reduce NVN capabilities to support the insurgencies in Laos and RVN, to punish NVN still further, and to establish more clearly the US intent to prevent a Communist seizure of RVN.²⁶

Fairly typical of the evolutionary development of a ROLLING THUNDER Program was RT 20. In their original draft planning message the Joint Staff included 11 fixed targets to be struck by the US planes and three targets to be struck by the VNAF. Of these 14 targets, one had been recommended by CINCPAC and the Secretary of Defense jointly, three by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, two by CINCPAC, one by CINCPAC and J-3 jointly, and the remaining seven by J-3. Of those recommended by J-3 only two had not been previously approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. At a meeting on 18 June the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to recommend approval of the two new targets.

In the ensuing consultation between the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Secretary of Defense, five US fixed targets and one RVNAF fixed target were removed from the draft proposal, leaving five US targets and two VNAF targets. While it is not clear at whose initiative these were excised it is

25. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1965, Vol II, pp. 337-338.

26. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-457-65 to SecDef, 11 Jun 65, (derived from JCS 2343/602), JMF 9155.3 (7 Jun 65).

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probable that the Secretary of Defense was responsible. At this point a draft planning message containing the targets and instructions approved by the Secretary of Defense for RT 20 was sent to CINCPAC to alert him. By this time the draft planning message had been shown to the State Department by the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA).²⁷ Upon seeing the list of fixed targets proposed by the Secretary of Defense, the State Department objected to hitting a thermal power plant and a POL installation at Nam Dinh. These were listed as one target because of their proximity. State Department authorities felt that they were "too close" to Haiphong, to SAM Site #1, and to Phuc Yen airfield. (The targets were actually 27 miles from the SAM site and 51 miles from the airfield.) They also believed that the installations were too close to civilian population areas, thus leading to the possibility of "high" casualties.

The Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), Mr. McNaughton, explained to the Secretary of Defense on 22 June that these targets were indeed the closest to Hanoi and Haiphong of any that had been recommended. With respect to the second State Department objection, the estimate of civilian casualties based on a relevant adjacent area population of 1,300 and assuming daylight alert conditions, had been placed at 30 casualties. Mr. McNaughton recommended that Mr. McNamara press for these targets, which represent 4 percent of NVN's thermal power capacity and 6.5 percent of its POL storage capacity. "If you must come up with an alternate target as a replacement," he said, "I suggest that you recommend Target 43, which was one of those recommended by the Chiefs for ROLLING THUNDER." Target 43 was an ammunition depot at Qui Hau. In the end, as a compromise solution, Secretary of State Rusk agreed to Target 43, and it replaced the Nam Dinh target on the list of approved fixed targets.

The final execute message for ROLLING THUNDER 20, sent on 24 June, contained five fixed US targets and two VNAF targets. Subsequently two airfields, Vinh and Dong Hoi, were added to

27. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 0438 to CINCPAC 21 Jun 65; (~~TS~~) Briefing for JCS, 18 Jun, J-3, ROLLING THUNDER Twenty; (~~TS~~) Memo, J-3 for CJCS, 17 Jun 65; (e) Note to Control Div, "Briefing on ROLLING THUNDER 20," 18 Jun 65; JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 3, ROLLING THUNDER 20.

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RT 20 as reconnaissance revealed that these fields, previously struck, had been restored to operational status by the enemy.²⁸

General Wheeler, on 28 June, informed Admiral Sharp that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were "considering urgently expanded military actions" both in RVN and NVN, with the objective of proving to the VC and to the NVN that they could not win in South Vietnam. "In North Vietnam," he said, "our objective is further to curtail by air strikes their capability and will to continue support to the VC."²⁹

An ad hoc study group appointed by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, following a conversation with the Secretary of Defense on 2 July, reported on 14 July that ROLLING THUNDER results through June showed that the program had not achieved the purpose intended. Although 10,000 sorties had been flown and 122 targets in NVN (the original JCS 94 targets had increased to 240) had been damaged or destroyed, the economic effects on NVN had been minor. "From a military standpoint," the report maintained, "the flow of material and manpower from NVN in support of VC/DRV operations in the south is still considerable. Direct attacks against military installations, while doubtless creating a disruptive effect on troops and upon their training, have not discernibly weakened the fiber of the DRV military structure. In short, the DRV still seems ready and able to endure air strikes at the current level."³⁰

Secretary of State Rusk, during an interview on 11 July, asserted that the United States had never "suspected" that air strikes against North Vietnam would be a "decisive element" but that the NVN had discovered that it was not going to be permitted to send tens of thousands of people into the RVN to attack it and still be permitted to live in safety and comfort "there in the North." There was to be no sanctuary for those committing aggression against the RVN and he warned that this was a fact that "others who may be supporting Hanoi must take fully into account."³¹

28. (TS) Memo, ASD(ISA) to SecDef, "ROLLING THUNDER XX," 22 Jun 65, w/pencilled notation, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 3, ROLLING THUNDER 20.

29. (TS) Msg, JCS 2400-65 to CINCPAC, 28 Jun 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 65.

30. (TS) CM-745-65 to SecDef, 14 Jul 65, OCJCS File, 091 Vietnam Jul 65.

31. Interv, Secretary Rusk, 11 Jul 65, Dept of State Bulletin, 2 Aug 65.

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During the Summer of 1965 the nature of the strike program against fixed targets did not, in spite of the urgings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the findings of the ad hoc group, change materially. ROLLING THUNDER programs between July and September authorized strikes on 59 fixed targets (27 of them restrikes) which included 26 barracks, 11 ammunition depots, two port facilities, seven bridges, two explosive plants, two thermal power plants, six supply depots, one hydroelectric power plant, one lock and one POL installation.³² Beginning with ROLLING THUNDER 22/23 on 9 July two packages were combined, designed to cover a two week period with the weight of effort to be approximately equal for each week. It was felt that this procedure, which he had suggested, would give CINCPAC more flexibility in his planning and conduct of the operations.³³

In this package the Joint Staff proposed strikes against bridges on the main rail line leading from China into NVN, one of the bridges only 17 miles from the China border. They also proposed moving the armed reconnaissance area north and north-westward to within 11.5 miles of the Chinese border in order to include the area of this rail line.³⁴

Even though the President's statement of early April seemed to support attacks against rail lines from China, higher authority disallowed the attacks on the bridges and did not move the armed reconnaissance area as far to the north as the Joint Staff had recommended. 22° N was made the northern limit of the area. Restrikes by armed reconnaissance planes were authorized against previously struck airfields and JCS numbered LOC targets if necessary to keep them out of commission.³⁵

During the twelve week period of RT 22/23 through 32/33 the tempo of the armed reconnaissance program, in contrast to the fixed target strikes, increased substantially. In RT 26/27 the limit on armed reconnaissance sorties was raised from 500 to 600 for the two week period, to 1,000 for ROLLING THUNDER 28/29,

32. (TS-NOFORN GP 1) JASON Summer Study, p.88, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

33. (TS) Note to Control Div "ROLLING THUNDER," 2 Jul 65, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 3, ROLLING THUNDER 22/23.

34. (TS) Briefing for the JCS on ROLLING THUNDER 22/23, 2 Jul 65; (TS) Memo for the CJCS, J-3, 1 Jul 65; same file.

35. (TS-GP 3) JCS 5226 to CINCPAC, 6 Jul 65.

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and 1,200 for RT 30/31 and RT 32/33. CINCPAC frequently asked for and received additional sortie authorizations to maintain the momentum of his attacks.³⁶ In their instruction to CINCPAC for RT 24/25 the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed him to plan his strikes and reconnaissance missions so that his planes would not "approach closer than fifteen (15) nautical miles of the China border."³⁷

In RT 26/27, ROLLING THUNDER fixed target authorization moved over the 22° N Parallel, and CINCPAC was finally authorized to strike a highway bridge on the highway to China. Other bridge targets in that same area were rejected by higher authority. Naval craft berthing areas and airfields were also authorized for armed reconnaissance strikes in this program.³⁸

New guidance granting authority to attack SAM systems "in a mobile mode" was reflected in the RT 28/29. CINCPAC was told on 17 August that he could attack such systems lying within the ROLLING THUNDER armed reconnaissance area. CINCPAC had made a number of specific recommendations on this particular package. He had asked that the armed reconnaissance area be expanded to new limits which would allow operations within 17 nautical miles of SAM sites in the Hanoi area and within 15 nautical miles of Phuc Yen on the north. The Joint Staff included these new geographical limits in the draft planning message. CINCPAC also recommended 800 sorties for the two week period; the Joint Staff increased this to 1,000 sorties feeling the greater number was warranted because of the increased tempo of operations against the LOCs. Of 15 fixed targets proposed by CINCPAC, the Joint Staff turned down eight for reasons ranging from the fact that they were not on the JCS Target List or lay in heavily populated areas to the fact that they were located close to Phuc Yen and would "be difficult to sell." In lieu of eight targets dropped, the staff substituted a group of key targets in the Haiphong/Hon Gay area. "If there is a substantial fall out of targets in the clearance process," the Joint Chiefs of Staff were informed, "the Chairman has eleven targets considered suitable as alternates; seven are restrikes."³⁹

36. (~~TS NOFORN~~) JASON Summer Study, p. 88.

37. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6369 to CINCPAC, 21 Jul '65.

38. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7398 to CINCPAC, 3 Aug 65.

39. (~~TS~~) Briefing for the Joint Chiefs of Staff on ROLLING THUNDER 28/29, 13 Aug 65, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) RT 28/29 - 20 Aug-2 Sep 65.

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CINCPAC had also recommended that he be allowed to restrike all JCS targets previously struck. The Joint Staff proposed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he be authorized to restrike only 37 of the 100 targets thus far struck, but designated eight more of the targets as jettison areas. Of the remaining targets, only 20 had more than 50 percent residual capacity. Because of this and of other factors the Joint Staff advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff that "CINCPAC has rather wide latitude in this area and . . . now is not the time to push for this broad change as requested."⁴⁰

On 13 August the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the recommendations of the Joint Staff and agreed "to give their full support to the Chairman's efforts to obtain permission to attack more profitable targets."⁴¹

In its final form RT 28/29 authorized CINCPAC to strike nine fixed targets, none of them particularly valuable. None of the Haiphong/Hon Gay targets were included.⁴²

Blockade and Mining

Another means considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for bringing pressure on NVN was blockade and mining of NVN ports. Such action combined with ROLLING THUNDER operations would substantially reduce the importation and movement of war materials into and through NVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had considered these actions as early as March 1964 and had proposed in November 1964 the aerial mining and naval blockade of NVN harbors as one of the series of increased military pressures that could be launched against NVN. On 6 April 1965, when President Johnson approved a program of expanded military operations in Vietnam, including the gradual acceleration of the ROLLING THUNDER program, he had stated that blockade and aerial mining of NVN ports should be considered "for future operations," but because of the "major political complications," he had directed further study of these matters.⁴³

40. Ibid.

41. (S) Note to Control Div, ROLLING THUNDER 28 and 29 13 Aug 65, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 4.

42. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8472 to CINCPAC, 17 Aug 68.

43. (TS-GP 1) Briefing Sheet for CJCS, JCS 2343/566-4, 2 Aug 66, JMF 9155.3 (6 Apr 65) sec 2. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-976-64 to Sec Def, 18 Nov 64 (derived from JCS 2339/157-1), JMF 9150 (13 Nov 64). (TS-GP 1) NSAM No. 328 to SecState, SecDef, and DCI, 6 Apr 65, Encl to JCS 2343/566, 7 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (6 Apr 65).

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In response to the Presidential direction, the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared a "Blockade and Aerial Mining Study," which they submitted to the Secretary of Defense on 8 August 1965. After reviewing the economic, political, and military aspects of blockade and mining, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended approval of aerial mining of the approaches to the ports of Haiphong, Hon Gay, and Cam Pha for inclusion in the ROLLING THUNDER program. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also recommended that the mining operations, once begun, be extended to minor NVN ports. As a complementary measure "for maximum impact" on NVN, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested the inclusion of an expanded interdiction campaign against "high density alternate LOCs" north of the 20th Parallel in ROLLING THUNDER operations.⁴⁴

The Secretary of Defense forwarded the Joint Chiefs of Staff study to the Department of State for an assessment of the political risks involved in the mining and expanded interdiction recommendations. Deputy Secretary Vance assured General Wheeler that, upon completion of the assessment, further consideration would be given to including the recommended actions in the ROLLING THUNDER program, but apparently no further action was taken on the Blockade and Aerial Mining Study.⁴⁵

The Target Study - NVN is Evaluated

In late August the basic list of targets in the "Target Study-North Vietnam" was evaluated and priorities assigned to the targets by the Joint Staff. Targets were separated into four groups: Group I - those targets which were a direct and immediate threat to US/RVN forces, military bases or installations; Group II - those targets (other than Group I) which were most critical to the military capability of NVN; Group III - those targets (other than those in Groups I and II) which directly contributed to the military capabilities of NVN; Group IV - remaining targets sustaining NVN military and economic capabilities. The staff analysis showed that only two Group I

44. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-608-65 to SecDef, 6 Aug 65, (derived from JCS 2343/566-4), JMF 9155.3 (6 Apr 65) sec 2.

45. (TS-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 18 Aug 65, Encl to 1st N/H to JCS 2343/566, 19 Aug 66, same file.

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and two Group II targets had been struck. 40 targets in Group III and 54 targets in Group IV had been attacked.⁴⁶

⁴⁶. (PS-GP 1) Study, "Priority Listing of Targets Included in The JCS North Vietnam Target List (U)," 20 Aug 65, OCJCS Bulky File, 091 Vietnam Aug 65.

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Chapter 26

ENEMY AIR DEFENSES - ROLLING THUNDER

US officials had acknowledged from the beginning of ROLLING THUNDER that the Soviet Union might, in reaction to US bombings, provide NVN more modern and effective air defense weapons. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, advised the Secretary of Defense on 27 March, however, that US intelligence authorities did not believe that any surface-to-air missiles had been deployed to NVN. Should the Soviet Union deploy these missiles, which they could do readily, they would probably provide Hanoi with the SA-2 missile. The SA-2 could be made operational within two or three weeks.¹

Within ten days, on 5 April, the first NVN SAM site was detected under construction 15 nautical miles south of Hanoi. By the end of July, a total of seven sites had been located in NVN, clustered around Hanoi. These sites, in various stages of readiness, were intended to support SA-2 missiles which had an effective range of 17 nautical miles. The SA-2 could attack targets as high as 90,000 feet and as low as 1,500 feet. Radar to detect and track air targets was associated with all sites.²

The appearance of SAMs in NVN caused the Joint Chiefs of Staff serious concern. On 14 April they alerted Secretary of Defense McNamara that it might be necessary to strike at the new enemy capability on short notice. At the same time they instructed CINCPAC to watch for new sites and to plan to attack the one site then identified.³

1. (TS-GP 1) CM-519-65 to SecDef, 27 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (19 Mar 65).

2. (S) DIA IB 69-65, 9 Apr 65. (S) Memo, DIA to CJCS, 12 May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65. (S) DIA IBs 90-65, 103-65, 117-65, 10 May, 27 May, and 17 Jun 65. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/545-6, 2 Jul 65, JMF 9155.3 (19 Mar 65). (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6655 to CINCPAC, 24 Jul 65. (TS-GP 1) J-3, TP-13-65 for JCS, 20 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (19 Mar 65).

3. (TS) JCSM-274-65 to SecDef, 14 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 Apr 65). (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8939 to CINCPAC, 14 Apr 65.

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Secretary McNamara informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 19 April that a decision to hit this site required careful analysis of political as well as military considerations. He asked to be kept informed of the status of SAM sites in NVN and directed that forces be alerted to attack them on short notice should it become necessary.⁴

During May, as new sites were detected, planning continued for attacks on the SAMs. The Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed CINCPAC to keep his ROLLING THUNDER aircraft away from the sites and not to attack them. On 27 May they warned Secretary McNamara that the growing SAM menace could threaten US air operations within a considerable area around Hanoi. Because the first site discovered could become operational at any time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that, despite political factors, the site be destroyed as a matter of "military urgency" and that this attack be coordinated with a B-52 strike on Phuc Yen airfield.⁵

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that current intelligence estimates sustained their recommendations. Although they informed the Secretary of Defense of this, he disapproved their recommendations on 15 June, mainly because the SAMs had not interfered with ROLLING THUNDER. He informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that if such interference occurred he would reconsider their recommendations. He offered also to arrange for them to discuss the matter with the President if they desired.⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not ask to see the President, but on 26 June they recommended to Secretary McNamara that the SAM sites be destroyed "as they near operational status." In support of their recommendation they reviewed for him the adverse effects that the presence of the SAMs were having on air operations by inhibiting reconnaissance and creating geographic sanctuaries which hindered ROLLING THUNDER. They asked to discuss this matter with him. The Secretary met with

4. (TS-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 19 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (23 May 65).

5. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-415-65 to SecDef, 27 May 65 (derived from JCS 2343/599), same file.

6. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-442-65 to SecDef, 7 Jun 65; (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 15 Jun 65; same file.

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the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 28 June but did not grant permission to strike the sites. Subsequently, on 3 July the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary, in response to a query from him, that striking the SAM sites after they became operational and after their defenses improved would be more costly than striking them while they were uncompleted. And they reiterated their earlier recommendation for destruction of the SAMs.⁷

No action was taken to destroy the sites, however, and on 24 July the United States learned that at least some of them had become operational. On that date a US jet fighter was shot down by a SAM 40 nm west of Hanoi.⁸

On the next day, 25 July, CINCPAC recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff attacks on all new SAM sites and submitted plans for striking three of them. Ambassador Taylor told the Secretary of State on the same day that new sites should be destroyed as they were discovered, but opposed "simultaneous" attacks on all known sites. He believed that such attacks would be wrong because: 1) there was no proof that all sites were occupied; 2) friendly aircraft losses would be increased by employment of large numbers; 3) such an attack would appear to the world as an escalation; and 4) a substantial number of Soviet advisors or technicians might be brought under attack.⁹

As the result of a Presidential decision, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 27 July, ordered CINCPAC to launch on that day one-time strikes against two SAM sites and their immediate support facilities. Attacking planes were to remain outside the cone of fire of other SAM sites. Armed reconnaissance missions were to be carried out subsequent to the strikes to destroy any mobile SAM installations in the immediate vicinity.¹⁰

7. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Memo, JCSM-498-65 to SecDef, 26 Jun 65 (derived from JCS 2343/599-4), JMF 9155.3 (23 May 65). (~~TS~~-GP 3) Memo, JCSM-529-65 to SecDef, 3 Jul 65 (derived from JCS 2343/545-5), JMF 9155.3 (19 Mar 65).

8. (~~TS~~-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 172-65, 26 Jul 65.

9. (~~TS~~-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 250551Z Jul 65, JCS IN 65596. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 252115Z Jul 65, JCS IN 66229. (~~TS~~) Msg, Saigon 265 to State, 25 Jul 65, JCS IN 65801.

10. (~~TS~~) Msg, JCS 6748 to CINCPAC, 27 Jul 65.

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The strikes were carried out as ordered. Although two US aircraft were lost in the operations, initial post-strike bomb damage assessment (BDA) showed that neither site had been damaged. Pilots asserted, however, that they had struck a SAM site or sites. Exactly what targets were struck and what actual damage, if any, was inflicted on the enemy's air defense system was not determined.

Intensified efforts to detect new sites took place in August. On 3 August the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized CINCPAC to carry out photo reconnaissance missions to detect, and special strikes to destroy, SAM sites. Sites could not be struck, however, if they lay within 30 nm of the CHICOM border, were in the area around Hanoi bounded by established sites, or were within 10 nm of Haiphong and Phuc Yen airfield. On 11 August the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered CINCPAC to carry out low-altitude armed reconnaissance within the ROLLING THUNDER area, but outside the forbidden areas, to destroy SAM sites. These missions were given the nickname IRON HAND.¹¹

In reaction to the shooting down of another US jet by a SAM about 50 miles southwest of Hanoi on 11 August, a costly and futile attempt was made to locate and destroy the site from which the SAM had been launched. Flying 124 sorties in search of the suspected target area during a 30-hour period on 12-13 August, US planes failed to locate any SAM sites. Two US planes were lost to SAMs and 11 others lost from enemy AAA fire and accident.¹²

Admiral Sharp blamed US inability to locate and destroy SAM sites on the lack of accurate intelligence. "... I consider our tactics as now refined are adequate to destroy the SA-2, provided intelligence can fix the site," he informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 24 August.¹³

11. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7385 to CINCPAC, 3 Aug 65. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7691 to CINCPAC, 11 Aug 65. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8113 to CINCPAC, 12 Aug 65.

12. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7990 to CINCPAC, 11 Aug 65. (~~TS~~-NOFORN-GP 3) Tab E to App 2 to Ann D of JCS PRONG TONG Study Report, vol III, JMF 9155.3 (17 Aug 65). (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 240238Z Aug 65, JCS IN17417.

13. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 240238Z Aug 65, JCS IN 17417.

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The enemy increased the tempo of the SA-2 activity in September, with the pattern of missile firing extending from the Thanh Hoa area in the south to the Cao Nung area, north-east of Hanoi, near the Chinese border. A drone and an F-105 were lost to missiles in September. The heaviest concentration of firings came from the Cao Nung area, where 13 unsuccessful firings occurred on 20 September in reaction to an air strike interdicting the Hanoi-Dong Dang rail line.

Not until mid-October was a SA-2 site attacked successfully. An attack on a site near Kep Ha, within 48 hours of the site's detection, caught the enemy by surprise and resulted in the destruction of missiles, radar vans, and missile transporters.¹⁴

Fortunately, enemy missiles were largely ineffective against the US pilots. Although Soviet technicians were suspected of assisting NVN, enemy missile crews remained inept during 1965. A combination of their ineptness and the skill of US pilots at evasive measures kept the "kill" ratio between the number of SAMs fired and the number of US planes downed at a very low level. Although 180 SAMs were fired at US planes during 1965, only 11 planes were lost to the missiles.¹⁵

The Enemy Air Threat

Another potential threat to ROLLING THUNDER operations lay in the additional MIG fighters that the Soviet Union had furnished to Hanoi. At the beginning of March, NVN had 36 MIGs. In less than three months, this inventory had increased to about 60 MIG-15s and MIG-17s based at Phuc Yen airfield.¹⁶

Because the President, in March, had directed that US planes avoid air combat with MIGs, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stipulated in ROLLING THUNDER and reconnaissance orders that US CAP pilots would engage MIGs only to protect themselves or

14. (~~TS~~ ~~NOFORN~~-GP 1) Memo, Dir DIA to CJCS, 22 Oct 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 65.

15. (~~S~~-GP 1) Encl to DJSM-1077-66, 25 Aug 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

16. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Ann F to Draft Report of the Armed Reconnaissance Study Group, 15 Nov 65 (hereafter cited as Armed Recce Study, Nov 65), OCJCS Bulky File, 091 Vietnam Nov 66. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Ann B to JCS 2343/599, 27 May 65, JMF 9155.3 (23 May 65).

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other US planes. The President, in his decisions of 1-2 April, directed that ROLLING THUNDER target systems avoid the effective GCI range of MIGs.¹⁷

In spite of the US policy of avoiding them, MIGs shot down two US jets and damaged another south of the 20th Parallel on 4 and 5 April. CINCPAC advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 4 April that the best way to destroy enemy MIGs was to attack their base, Phuc Yen airfield. The Joint Chiefs of Staff fully agreed but realized that such an attack was not "politically feasible" at that time.¹⁸

Admiral Sharp informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff again on 9 May that the best way to eliminate the MIG threat was to destroy them on the ground at Phuc Yen. The arguments for attacking Phuc Yen were strengthened by the arrival at the NVN base during May of five Soviet light jet bombers. The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised Secretary McNamara on 27 May that the presence of these bombers threatened the US base at Da Nang. They recommended that Phuc Yen be bombed in order to destroy both the bomber threat and the MIG threat. The Secretary of Defense disapproved this recommendation on 15 June. His decision was prompted by opposition to the bombing from Ambassador Taylor and COMUSMACV and by a recent intelligence estimate that NVN probably did not intend to use the bombers in offensive actions.¹⁹

Less than two weeks later, the Joint Chiefs of Staff made further efforts to secure authorization to bomb Phuc Yen, pointing out to the Secretary in a memorandum on 27 June the military necessity of so doing. They insisted that current intelligence estimates theorizing that the enemy did not intend to use his bombers against RVN were not significant.

17. (~~TS~~) Msg, JCS 0936-65 to CINCPAC, 16 Mar 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 65. (~~TS~~) NSAM 328, 6 Apr 65.

18. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) NMCC OPSUMS 77-65 and 78-65, 4 and 5 Apr 65. (~~S NOFORN~~-GP 1) DIA/JCS, Southeast Asia Military Fact Book, Oct 66, DIAISUP 274-66, pp. B-20, B-21. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 040304Z Apr 65, JCS IN 91149. (~~TS~~-GP 4) JCS 2343/571, 13 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (12 Apr 65).

19. (~~TS~~) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 092218Z May 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 65. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-415-65 to SecDef, 27 May 65 (derived from JCS 2343/599); (~~TS~~) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 15 Jun 65, Att to JCS 2343/599-2, 16 Jun 65; JMF 9155.3 (23 May 65).

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They said ". . . we cannot deal in the estimated intentions of the enemy but must base our actions on enemy capabilities which, from a military point of view, we cannot afford to ignore, particularly when the elimination of the threat can be accomplished at this time by a relatively low cost." The Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that by bombing Phuc Yen not only the enemy bomber threat but the increasing MIG threat could be removed. In spite of these arguments, the Secretary did not authorize the bombing of Phuc Yen. More than two years were to pass before he would do so.²⁰

The bombers were never used against RVN, however. As for the MIGs, while they had an inhibiting effect on ROLLING THUNDER, they shot down no more US planes during 1965. US pilots, on the other hand, destroyed five MIGs, and possibly destroyed two others.²¹

Enemy AA/AAA

The most effective of the enemy's active defenses against US/VNAF planes operating over NVN were neither the SAMs nor the MIGs, but his automatic small arms and his large number of AA artillery pieces, both manual and radar controlled. By February 1965, 941 AA artillery positions had been detected in NVN by US intelligence. By late September, 1,600 positions had been uncovered, ranging from the 37mm manually-controlled guns to the highly effective radar-directed 85mm pieces. A total of 118 USAF, USN, and VNAF planes had been lost in flying almost 25,000 sorties over NVN by 30 September. Twenty-three US planes had been lost to enemy ground fire in the month of September alone.²²

Although there was no concrete evidence to prove it, NVN actions suggested a basic understanding of US operational concepts. The enemy placed his heaviest AAA defense around targets of obvious and continuing interest to the United States.

20. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-498-65 to SecDef, 26 Jun 65, Encl A to JCS 2343/599-4, JMF 9155.3 (23 May 65).

21. (~~S~~-NOFORN-GP 1) DIA/JCS, Southeast Asia Military Fact Book, Apr 67, DIAISUP 91-67, p. B-24.

22. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Ann D to Armed Recce Study, Nov 65, p. 11, OCJCS Bulky File 091 Vietnam Nov 66.

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He also apparently moved AA weapons into an area after an initial strike, in anticipation of restrike.²³

Reconnaissance Rules Change

The Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized CINCPAC on 24 August to fly BLUE TREE reconnaissance missions in support of ROLLING THUNDER at his discretion throughout the armed reconnaissance area. They moved the southernmost boundary of armed reconnaissance north to 20° 30' N for this purpose. CINCPAC was restricted to 20 two-sortie missions a week, but missions could be flown at low level. MIG CAP was authorized but the planes would withdraw if MIGs were sighted. MIG CAP could engage the enemy only to protect reconnaissance planes. Flak suppression escort, and any BLUE TREE flights outside the authorized area, would be approved in Washington on a case-by-case basis.²⁴

The armed reconnaissance area limits were expanded during RT 28/29 to a line from a point on the Laos border 30 nm from the border of China, extending eastward to 105° 20' E longitude, then south to 20° 30' latitude, then eastward to the coast. Strikes against SAM sites were forbidden within 30 nm of the Chinese border from Laos eastward to 106° E longitude, within 25 nm of the Chinese border from that point eastward to the Gulf of Tonkin; within 30 nm of the center of Hanoi; or within 10 nm of the center of Haiphong. (See map).²⁵

Armed reconnaissance boundaries reached another high in RT 30/31 (3-16 September) when new limits were set which ran due west from the coast at a point at 20° 30' N latitude to 105° 20' E longitude then due north to a point 30 nm from the Chinese border, then southwesterly to the Laos border, remaining 30 nm from the Chinese border (the Joint Chiefs of Staff had proposed 25 nm). Another new feature of this package was authority for CINCPAC to assign to strike aircraft returning from BARREL ROLL and STEEL TIGER alternate missions in the ROLLING THUNDER area.²⁶

23. (~~TS~~ ~~NOFORN~~-GP 1) Memo, Dir DIA to CJCS, 22 Oct 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 65.

24. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8977 to CINCPAC, 24 Aug 65.

25. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9569 to CINCPAC, 31 Aug 65.

26. (~~TS~~) Memo, J-3 to CJCS, 27 Aug 65; Briefing for JCS on RT 30/31, 27 Aug 65; (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9779 to CINCPAC, 2 Sep 65; JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 5, RT 30/31.

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The Early September Call For Stronger Action

When, on 27 August, the Joint Chiefs of Staff submitted to the Secretary of Defense major recommendations on the basic US strategy for Vietnam, they called for stronger air and naval pressures. Specifically, these included destruction of significant NVN military targets, the NVN supply base, and interdiction of the LOCs supporting the insurgency in South Vietnam. "The physical capability of the DRV to move men and supplies through the Lao Corridor, down the coastline, across the DMZ and through Cambodia must be reduced to the maximum practical extent by land, naval and air actions in these area and against infiltration-connected targets," the Joint Chiefs of Staff asserted.²⁷

Six days later, on 2 September, the Joint Chiefs of Staff gave the Secretary a list of air actions which they believed to be "in concert" with this strategy. They recommended that the United States should begin air strikes immediately and "as a matter of urgency" against: 1) Phuc Yen airfield, including the aircraft thereon; 2) rail, highway, and waterway routes and traffic between Hanoi and Haiphong and between Hanoi/Haiphong and south China; 3) POL storage facilities at Haiphong; SAM sites and other AA defenses which threatened US air operations.²⁸

Their rationale for striking Phuc Yen and the SA-2 sites was the same as that presented in June. Interdiction of the LOCs between the major NVN industrial and shipping centers and between south China was needed the Joint Chiefs of Staff said

. . . to reduce substantially the present freedom of movement into the DRV of major war-making supplies, including heavy and complex equipment such as SA-2 missiles and modern antiaircraft artillery with radar fire control and ammunition. Further, interdiction of principal LOCs around Hanoi would assist in immobilizing and fixing in place the SA-2 defenses, thus impairing present mobile ambush tactics.

The enemy, said the Joint Chiefs of Staff, now had 66 MIGs and 8 IL-28s based at Phuc Yen. A total of 18 SAM sites had

27. (43-GP 1) JCSM-652-65 to SecDef, 27 Aug 65 (derived from JCS 2343/646-1), JMF 9155.3 (30 Jul 65).

28. (43-GP 3) JCSM-670-65 to SecDef, 2 Sep 65, App A to JCS 2343/673-1, 2 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (28 Aug 65).

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been located, all but two fairly close to Hanoi. Missiles or missile-associated equipment had been noted on only four of these sites, and it was possible that many were only temporary field sites. NVN could move these missiles about in an 85 nm radius of Hanoi without serious difficulty and apparently was doing so. Just how missiles and equipment were entering NVN was not known. Destruction of the POL storage at Haiphong would deprive NVN of nearly half of its remaining national capacity for oil storage. This facility was the only one in NVN capable of receiving POL imports from tankers.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that the strikes should be made as "a concentrated offensive effort, unrestricted by previously prescribed sanctuaries within the DRV, to search out and destroy SAM installations, as required, and to conduct low-level reconnaissance to encourage the maldistribution of AAA resources." B-52s would strike Phuc Yen at night, with the other NVN airfields being attacked at first light the next day. Concurrently, Haiphong POL would be struck, and intensive interdiction of specified routes would follow. Every effort would be made to keep down destruction of nonmilitary installations and no civilian population centers would be targeted.

Failure to initiate air operations against North Vietnam as now recommended . . . to support the over-all strategy for Southeast Asia would result in increased US commitments, costs, and casualties and increasing risks to the security of major elements of US and SVN military forces and facilities. Each day's delay produces increased enemy capability which will have to be destroyed eventually at an increasingly higher cost to the United States.

They asked that their views be brought to the attention of the President "without delay."²⁹

The JCS recommendations were incorporated in the draft planning message for RT 32/33, scheduled for 17-30 September. Added to the target list, in addition to the targets and systems cited in their 2 September memorandum, were four thermal power plants generating nearly 50 percent of NVN electrical power. Secretary McNamara refused to approve the proposed ROLLING THUNDER package, saying that he had

29. Ibid.

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not been persuaded that the military advantages would outweigh the military and political risks. He maintained that while the proposed strikes were for the purpose of reducing the flow of material from NVN to RVN by attacking the LOCs, intelligence estimates showed that such strikes could very well cause the NVN to make "more vigorous efforts" to support the VC. Strikes as proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff would not, according to the estimates he had seen, injure the VC or persuade NVN that the price of continued support to them was too high. "More important is the risk of a US-Chinese confrontation, which could well be increased by a program of the kind proposed." Pointing to a JCS warning that NVN might use its IL-28s and MIGs against the US air base at Da Nang, the Secretary cited an intelligence analysis that such an attack was unlikely. On the other hand the analysis had also shown that if the US struck the Hanoi/Haiphong area, NVN might in retaliation attack Da Nang, and that substantial risk existed that a strike program of the weight and kind recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff would cause the Chinese Communists to intervene with air from Chinese bases.³⁰

The reduced RT 32/33 package finally approved by the Secretary of Defense permitted strikes on a railroad bridge and on a highway bridge NW of Hanoi on routes leading to China. These bridges could only be struck one time. These were the first strikes on a LOC in this area. Apart from these, the package contained relatively unimportant targets, most of them restrikes. CINCPAC was directed not to strike fixed SAM sites located within a 30 nm radius from the center of Hanoi.³¹

The bridges were struck with "limited success." But the net effect of the package was, CINCPAC noted, to leave the entire northeast quadrant of NVN free from harassment.³²

The directive on RT 30/31 had provided that any JCS numbered target within the currently authorized armed reconnaissance area which had previously been designated for

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30. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 15 Sep 65, Att to (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/673-4, 17 Sep 65, JMF 9155.3 (28 Aug 65).
31. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1689 to CINCPAC, 15 Sep 65.
32. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 182215Z Sep 65.

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attack could again be attacked if necessary. This qualification was changed in the rules for RT 32/33 to provide that only LOC targets observed under repair could be so attacked. CINCPAC, on 22 September, asked that the original proviso be restored.³³

CINCPAC's request was granted and the authority he sought restored in RT package 34/35, carried out between 1-14 October. This package contained only four fixed targets for the US forces, three of them bridges northwest of Hanoi.

Attacks on Dams and Locks

Assistant Secretary of State William P. Bundy, on 16 September, in a memorandum to the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), had called attention to reports that ROLLING THUNDER strikes, probably armed reconnaissance, had damaged several dams and a canal lock in NVN. He cited NVN charges that the United States was attacking dams in its territory. The State Department, Bundy said, understood that dams were not considered targets of opportunity and, at least for the present, were not authorized targets for armed reconnaissance. "We do not believe that it is now appropriate to classify dams, canal locks, or flood control levees as valid targets for the ROLLING THUNDER program," he said. He asked that ROLLING THUNDER instructions be amended specifically to exclude dams, canal locks, hydroelectric power plants and flood control levees unless approved by Washington on a case-by-case basis as regular preplanned strikes. Mr. McNaughton passed Mr. Bundy's memorandum to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and asked for General Wheeler's views.³⁴

In his reply General Wheeler disagreed with Mr. Bundy's view that dams and locks were not valid military targets. He stated that he had no information about the dams reportedly damaged, but made clear his distrust of any claim emanating from Hanoi. The NVN inland waterway system, of which dams and locks were a part, had recently become more important to NVN, owing to destruction of its land LOCs. No other types of dams or flood control levees were on the JCS target list,

33. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 220238Z Sep 65.

34. (TS) Memo, AsstSecState for FE Affairs to ASD(ISA), 16 Sep 65, Encl to (TS-GP 3) Memo, ASD(ISA) to CJCS, I-3635-65, 22 Sep 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 65.

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and there was no intention of including them at this time. Since one hydroelectric plant and four thermal power plants had already been struck in ROLLING THUNDER, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, was puzzled by Mr. Bundy's questioning of such targets. General Wheeler told McNaughton, "I can assure you that the Joint Chiefs of Staff will strongly oppose the imposition of further restraints upon our air campaign against the DRV."

Then, turning to a matter that apparently concerned him, the Chairman called attention to a recent State Department comment that the United States had made "many prior official indications, public and private, that we intended to respect the special sensitivity of the Hanoi-Haiphong complex." He asked Mr. McNaughton to obtain for the Joint Chiefs of Staff a listing of all such indications other than those possibly contained in statements by the President or the Secretaries of State and Defense.³⁵

Mr. McNaughton agreed with General Wheeler in this matter and so informed Mr. Bundy. Further, he asked Mr. Bundy to provide the list of the indications requested by the Chairman.³⁶

In an immediate reply, Mr. Bundy stated to Mr. McNaughton that he was not in a position "to comment further . . . on the question of locks and dams." But he defended his assertion that US officials had consistently given the impression to the enemy and to other nations as well that the United States would continue the policy it had been pursuing, including abstention from attacks on the Hanoi/Haiphong area. He admitted that nothing had been said officially nor was it intended to do so. "I do want to conclude by assuring you and General Wheeler that we have no intention of changing the line we have taken so consistently, basically that we are not excluding this or any other action. Obviously, we must not say anything that could impair our freedom of action or the President's freedom of choice on future actions."³⁷

35. (TS-GP 1) CM-876-65 to ASD(ISA), 24 Sep 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 65.

36. (TS-GP 1) Memo, ASD(ISA) to AsstSecState for FE Affairs, I-36222/65, 28 Sep 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 65.

37. (TS-GP 3) Ltr, Bundy to McNaughton, 1 Oct 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam, Oct 65.

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De Facto Reduction of Bombing Pressures

On 2 October CINCPAC recommended that RT 36/37 follow the trend established in RT 32/33, with strikes against primary LOC targets in the northeast quadrant. He listed five rail and highway bridges as fixed targets. In the draft planning message, the Joint Staff included all these and added Kep Airfield, Kep POL, and four additional bridges leading to the Chinese border. The Staff also proposed raising sorties from 1,200 to 1,500 and increasing the armed reconnaissance area to coincide with the IRON HAND area. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were briefed on the proposed package on 8 October and apparently accepted the Staff recommendations. The Secretary of Defense on 13 October made substantial changes in the draft planning message. Mr. McNamara struck out all the proposed targets but four bridges for US forces and one target for the VNAF in the southern part of NVN. Thus started a pattern that continued for the remainder of 1965; fixed target authorization for ROLLING THUNDER packages was restricted to four bridge targets in the northeast quadrant and one VNAF target in southern NVN. Exceptions were made on only three occasions when special authorization was granted for attack of SAM support facilities.³⁸

In acting on RT 36/37, Mr. McNamara rejected raising the sortie limit to 1,500. He also directed that planes keep their flight paths 20 rather than the earlier 15 miles from the Chinese border, and, in apparent concession to Mr. Bundy's earlier objections, specifically excluded locks and dams from JCS numbered targets that might be restructured by armed reconnaissance to keep them nonoperational.³⁹

Review of ROLLING THUNDER

By late October the JCS Target List comprised 240 targets, 126 of which had been struck. Of the remaining 114

38. (TS-GP 3) Draft Planning Msg, unnumbered, w/hand-written notes dated 13 Oct 65, showing changes directed by SecDef; (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3990 to CINCPAC, 13 Oct 65, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) RT 36/37. (TS-GP 3) ROLLING THUNDER Chronology, Encl A to JCS 2472/9, 14 Feb 67, JMF 912/323 (30 Jan 67).

39. Ibid.

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targets, 75 lay in the sanctuaries. Only 39 unstruck targets lay outside the sanctuary areas and of these 29 were in the key northeast quadrant.⁴⁰

Over 740 NVN bridges had been attacked, and at least 145 of these had been destroyed or rendered impassable for motor traffic. At about half of these sites the enemy had built readily accessible by-passes for motor traffic. Thirty-one rail or combination rail and highway bridges had been destroyed out only 13 of these remained impassable. The enemy had repaired some of these bridges and at others had built fords, ferries, and alternate bridging using floats and pontoons, or earthen causeways.⁴¹

By late October, too, ROLLING THUNDER strike forces had flown 6,752 sorties against fixed targets and 11,149 sorties on armed reconnaissance. Of the sorties against fixed targets, over a third had been against military barracks, and about one-sixth against ammunition depots. Supply depots, power plants, maritime ports, RR yards and explosive plants had come in for minor shares of the overall effort. Four airfields, two naval bases, thirteen radar sites, four SAM sites, and two communications installations had been bombed. In addition to other damage inflicted, armed reconnaissance sorties had destroyed 328 vessels, 423 vehicles and 181 RR cars and engines.⁴²

Assessing the effects of ROLLING THUNDER on 22 October, the DIA told the Secretary of Defense that the bombing had not affected the enemy's will and determination to persist. Hanoi continued to assert its intent to press on with the war in RVN despite US actions in NVN and RVN. The capabilities of the NVN armed forces had not been greatly affected by the attacks on economic facilities, but military movement was being hampered by damaged transportation facilities.

40. (TS-GP 3) Tab B to App 1 to Ann C of Armed Recce Study, 15 Nov 65, OCJCS Bulky Files 091 Vietnam Nov 66.

41. (S-NOFORN-GP 1) CM-940-65 to SecDef, 30 Oct 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 65.

42. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) "An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam," Encl to Memo, Dir DIA to CJCS, 22 Oct 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 65.

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The Director, DIA, noted that efforts to further reduce the NVN capabilities and capacities in some categories were going to be difficult, because 51 percent of all maritime ports and about 60 percent of POL, power plant, and railroad capacities lay within the sanctuary areas.⁴³

With the variety and number of fixed targets for US forces reduced to four bridges, and with the armed reconnaissance limits frozen in a static mode, there was a noticeable decrease in the military pressures against NVN. This effect lasted until the stand-down of military operations associated with the Christmas truce, which began on 24 December 1965 (See below). RT packages 38/39, 40/41, 42/43, 44/45 were cautiously crafted, contained little innovation of a worthwhile military nature, and had little real effect on enemy capabilities or determination. A few minor changes in operating rules did relieve some of the restraints. In late November, the Joint Chiefs of Staff attempted to have armed reconnaissance limits lifted slightly to 20° 32' at the west coast to be approximately contiguous with the 30 nm circle around Hanoi. Higher authority allowed the lifting of the armed reconnaissance limits by only one minute, to 20° 31' latitude.⁴⁴ The restriction limiting suppression strikes against SAM units firing on US planes to those located outside the 30 nm circle around Hanoi, was also removed in RT 42/43. RT 46/47 expanded authority for coastal armed reconnaissance (see below).⁴⁵

That the program continued at a reduced and relatively ineffective level could not be attributed to lack of effort on the part of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They tried, determinedly and persistently, to persuade their superiors to reduce the area of sacrosanct territory in NVN and to unleash US air power on fixed targets of greater value, such as the POL storage system. In none of these endeavors were they successful.

Admiral Sharp, had, since midsummer, been calling for destruction of the NVN POL supply and facilities in the

⁴³. Ibid.

⁴⁴. (TS-GP 1) JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65), sec 6, ROLLING THUNDER 42/43, Tabs 1-7.

⁴⁵. (TS-GP 3) Encl A to Att to JCS 2472/9, 14 Feb 67, JMF 912/323 (30 Jan 67).

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Haiphong/Hanoi complex. In his ROLLING THUNDER recommendations and in separate communications he pointed out the wisdom of such strikes. On 15 October the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, asked the Joint Staff to advise him whether it would be desirable to destroy the Haiphong POL facility in the light of possible attacks by the VC on US POL facilities in reprisal. On 5 November he asked the Staff to examine the desirability of destroying not only Haiphong POL but the entire POL system in NVN. The Staff concluded that the entire NVN bulk POL system should be attacked at once, commencing with an attack on the Haiphong facilities. Whether or not the VC attacked POL in RVN in reprisal should not be a factor in the decision.⁴⁶

On 10 November the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the Secretary of Defense approve immediate attacks on the NVN POL system, starting with Haiphong POL, with subsequent attacks on eight other POL targets. They believed that this would be more damaging than attacks on any other target system; it would cripple the enemy's transportation system to a considerable degree and greatly hamper the flow of supplies southward to communist military forces. They pointed out that Haiphong, with 40 percent of the total storage capacity in NVN, was the most important target involved.⁴⁷

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed, they told the Secretary of Defense,

that the air operations in DRV/Laos cannot attain more than the limited success now being achieved if they continue to be conducted under the existing constraints. The establishment and observance of de facto sanctuaries within the DRV, coupled with a denial of operations against the most important military and war supporting targets, preclude complete attainment of the objectives of the air campaign. Decisions should be reached to permit an immediate acceleration and increase in

46. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/700-2, 7 Nov 65, JMF 9155.3 (15 Oct 65).

47. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-810-65 to SecDef, 10 Nov 65, Encl to JCS 2343/700-2, 10 Nov 65, JMF 9155.3 (15 Oct 65).

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the scale, scope, and intensity of air operations against the DRV, to include attack of military and war supporting targets within the Hanoi-Haiphong area, and to permit aerial mining of North Vietnam ports.⁴⁸

This recommendation was further reflected in the draft planning messages for RT 42/43 approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 19 November but disapproved by higher authority on 22 November. Attacks on POL storage, including Hanoi and Haiphong, were again proposed in the draft for RT 44/45. At a meeting on 1 December the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the proposed RT 44/45 for submission for Defense-State-White House clearance. They also directed the Joint Staff to prepare a proposed reduction in the size of the sanctuary in the Hanoi/Phuc Yen/Haiphong area to present to the Secretary of Defense. Apparently anticipating another rejection of the POL targets, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, also directed the Staff to prepare an alternate proposal which would continue the interdiction of key LOCs to the north and east of Hanoi.

The Staff proposed reducing the sanctuary areas to ten miles around Hanoi, ten miles around Phuc Yen Airfield, and four miles around Haiphong, which would have the effect of uncovering 30 JCS numbered targets, if approved. The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved these proposals for presentation to higher authority on 3 December. Higher authority deleted all POL targets, authorizing only four bridge strikes for US planes, and retained the current size of sanctuary areas.⁴⁹

In drafting proposals for RT 46/47, to take place between 24 December 1965 and 6 January 1966, the Joint Staff again proposed striking the POL system in NVN and reduction of the sanctuary areas to within 20 nm of Hanoi and four nm of Haiphong. The execute order for the package, issued on 21 December, contained authority for four bridge strikes only,

48. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-811-65 to SecDef, 10 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2343/655-26), 10 Nov 65, JMF 9155.3 (3 Aug 65) sec 5.

49. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65), sec 6, ROLLING THUNDER 42/43, Tabs 1-7. (~~TS~~-GP 3) same file, sec 7, ROLLING THUNDER 44/45.

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but authorized a restrike of the Uong Bi thermal power plant, if BDA showed a requirement. There was no reduction of the sanctuaries.⁵⁰

In December, intelligence information gave some evidence that NVN might be planning to send its patrol boats out to attack US destroyers standing on SAR station in the Gulf of Tonkin. These destroyers were, of course, essential to the rescue of downed US flyers in the Gulf. Because of this threat, higher authority authorized special instructions to CINCPAC which would allow air operations along the NVN coast from 20° 31' N north and east, an area previously excluded from coastal armed reconnaissance. His planes could now strike "positively identified DRV attack-type naval craft" all along the coast of NVN within 3 nm and not closer than 10 nm of Haiphong and not closer than 25 nm of China. However, such craft found outside the 3-nm limit would not be struck unless they fired first.⁵¹

In accordance with the Presidential decision to halt military action against the enemy in Vietnam during Christmas, the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed CINCPAC to halt all air operations over NVN and Laos effective at 1800 (Saigon time), 24 December 1965. This was modified slightly on 23 December when the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized BLUE SPRINGS operations over NVN and Laos during the Christmas Truce as long as these operations did not involve "manned support aircraft."⁵² Although some reconnaissance activities resumed in late December, the bar on air attacks against NVN was not lifted for more than a month.

50. (~~TS~~-GP 1) JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65), sec 7, ROLLING THUNDER 46/47, Tabs 1-10.

51. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8930 to CINCPAC, 18 Dec 65.

52. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9198 to CINCPAC, 23 Dec 65;

(~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4991-65 to CINCPAC, 23 Dec 65; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 65.

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Chapter 27

THE CIVIL SIDE - DEVELOPMENTS IN RVN

In early 1965, the United States faced not only a deteriorating military situation in South Vietnam, but also continued political confusion in Saigon. Despite the best efforts of Ambassador Taylor, affairs in Saigon did not improve during January. On 27 January 1965, using the pretext of Buddhist demonstrations, General Khanh and the Armed Forces Council (AFC) had ousted the Huong Government and appointed former Deputy Prime Minister Xuan Oanh as a caretaker prime minister until a new government could be selected and installed.

The removal of Huong silenced the Buddhist agitation for the moment, but the political situation remained uncertain. The position of General Khanh was far from clear, and rumors circulated that he planned to have himself selected Chief of State, a possibility that Ambassador Taylor found completely unsatisfactory. Ambassador Taylor was convinced that Khanh was a hindrance to the achievement of stability in Saigon and a major obstacle to the realization of US purposes in South Vietnam. He believed that the United States could not win with a government headed by Khanh, and he favored every possible action to prevent such an event. This view, shared in Washington, prompted Ambassador Taylor indirectly to suggest to General Ky and certain other AFC members that action be taken to prevent Khanh from achieving supreme power.¹

Belying Ambassador Taylor's fears, General Khanh made no attempt to assume the leadership of the new government. On 16 February the AFC announced that Phan Khac Suu would remain as Chief of State and that Dr. Phan Huy Quat, a former foreign minister, would serve as Prime Minister.

1. (S) Msgs, Saigon 2382 and 2389 to State, 3 Feb 65, JCS IN 11361 and 11594. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2391 to State, 3 Feb 65, JCS IN 11766. (TS-GP 3) Msg, State 1601 to Saigon, 4 Feb 65, JCS IN 12612; (S) Msg, Saigon 2400 to State, 4 Feb 65, JCS IN 13335.

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The AFC also announced that the 20 October 1964 Charter would remain in force; that the military-civilian council, a transitional legislative body, would be quickly assembled; and that a national assembly would be convened at a date to be determined by the government and the AFC. The AFC renewed its pledge to restrict itself to military problems and to step up the war once the government was functioning, but added that it would act as intermediary whenever necessary to preserve the equilibrium until there was a government elected directly by the people. The following day, 17 February, General Khanh announced the formation of the long-promised military-civilian council--the National Legislative Council. The 20-member Council had six military representatives, three unofficial representatives for each of the four major religious groups--Buddhists, Catholics, Cao Dai, and Hoa Hao--and two independents. The Council was to exercise legislative power as defined in the 20 October Charter until the election of a national assembly. In fact, however, it never did.²

The formation of the Quat government and the establishment of the National Legislative Council considerably brightened the prospects for civilian rule in Saigon. Ambassador Taylor told Washington that the Quat government had two characteristics missing from previous post-Diem governments, a central core of "like-minded men" and wide representation among religious and political groups as well as national regions.³

Scarcely had Quat entered office when an attempted coup rocked Saigon. Dissident officers, led by Brigadier General Tan Van Phat and Col. Phan Ngoc Thao, moved against authorities in Saigon on the afternoon of 19 February. The coup forces surrounded General Khanh's house and seized the radio station and the post, telephone, and telegraph exchange (PTT), and marched on Tan Son Nhut

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2. (U) Msg, Saigon 2620 to State, 16 Feb 65, JCS IN
29589. (S) Msg, Saigon 2637 to State, 17 Feb 65, JCS IN
31034. (S) Msg, Saigon 2719 to State, 23 Feb 65, JCS IN
37826.
3. (S) Msg, Saigon 2719 to State, 23 Feb 65, JCS IN
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air base. The leaders demanded the removal of Khanh, criticized the anti-Diem revolution of November 1963, and advocated the separation of religion from politics.⁴

After 24 hours of confusion, with General Ky threatening to bomb Tan Son Nhut air base and General Westmoreland urging him in "strongest terms" against this action, the coup collapsed, and General Phat and Col. Thao fled. The Quat government survived the abortive coup, but General Khanh did not fare so well. On 21 February, the AFC ousted Khanh as Commander in Chief, RVNAF, and Quat and Chief of State Suu issued a decree replacing Khanh with Major General Tran Van Minh. Subsequently, Quat named Khanh as ambassador-at-large, and Khanh left South Vietnam on 24 February to take up diplomatic assignments in Europe and the United States.⁵

The survival of Quat and the removal of Khanh brought a brief interlude of viable government to South Vietnam. There was, for the moment, a functioning civilian government in Saigon, although it operated under the watchful eye of the AFC. US officials in both Saigon and Washington were encouraged that this was a government capable of supporting the expanded military efforts currently under way or planned for South Vietnam. Ambassador Taylor reported that Quat gave "firm direction from his side while paying appropriate consideration to his military colleagues," who in turn played "constructive and supporting roles." Taylor added that: "For the first time, there appears to be something approaching a single team on the other side of the table."⁶

4. (S) Msg, Saigon 2654 to State, 19 Feb 65, JCS IN 33415. (S) Msg, Saigon 2719 to State, 23 Feb 65, JCS IN 37826.

5. (S-GP 4) Msg, Saigon 2671 to State, 19 Feb 65, JCS IN 33648. (S) Msg, Saigon 2675 to State, 20 Feb 65, JCS IN 34717. (S) Msg, Saigon 2677 to State, 20 Feb 65, JCS IN 34748. (S) Msg, Saigon 2684 to State, 20 Feb 65, JCS IN 35088. (S-GP 4) Telecon, MACV to NMCC, 191235Z Feb 65, JCS IN 33750. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 2714 to State, 23 Feb 65, JCS IN 37577. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 2740 to State, 25 Feb 65, JCS IN 40498. (S) Telecons, MACV to NMCC, 200300Z, 200335Z, 200110Z, 201215Z, 211914Z, and 220423Z Feb 65, JCS IN 34701, 34747, 34606, 35334, 36567, and 36822.

6. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 2787 to State, 27 Feb 65, JCS IN 44139.

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Another promising sign for the future of the Quat government was the dissolution of the AFC in early May. Quat had worked quietly to this end for weeks, and the dissolution of the Council marked the end of the extra-governmental military body with its checkered history of intervention in the affairs of state. On 5 May a delegation of generals from the Council informed the Prime Minister of their decision to dissolve their organization because the government had proved itself capable of trust. At a press conference following the formal dissolution ceremony on 6 May, General Thieu stated that the Council was dissolved in order to permit the military to concentrate on the war as it became more decisive. He added that the military members of the cabinet and the National Legislative Council planned to resign their positions and pledge support for the legal government. For the first time in over four months the government would be completely in the hands of the civilians.⁷

The emergence of a civilian government in Saigon proved to be only a prelude to yet another political upheaval. In the weeks following the dissolution of the AFC, Prime Minister Quat precipitated a crisis when he tried to dismiss Interior Minister Hiep and Economy Minister Vinh. Chief of State Suu refused to confirm the dismissals, because he considered the act illegal under the terms of the Provisional Charter. He suggested that Quat resign instead, and then Suu would reappoint him, leaving him free to create a new cabinet. The political impasse rapidly assumed crisis proportions as a growing number of dissident elements, especially the militant Catholic refugees, coalesced behind Suu in opposition to Quat.⁸

The militant northern Catholic refugee elements, claiming to have the support of 500,000 Catholics and led by influential Father Quynh, charged Quat with religious discrimination and petitioned Suu to remove the "illegal" Quat government and to establish a government "that all religions can support." Catholic criticism of Quat had

7. (C) Msg, Saigon 3674 to State, 6 May 65, JCS IN 47399. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 18.

8. (S-GP 1) Dept of State, Intelligence Note MM-RFE 65-160, 28 May 65. (TS) Msg, Saigon 3982 to State, 1 Jun 65, JCS IN 84437.

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grown over the past month based on accusations that the government's draft religion law favored the Buddhists at the expense of other religions, that Catholic civil and military officials were discriminated against, and that Quat was more interested in negotiating with the communists than in pursuing the war. US intelligence sources believed that the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religious sects were joining the Catholics in their campaign against Quat. Ambassador Taylor warned Quat that Catholic sentiment against him was very strong and the longer he postponed reaching an agreement with them the greater would be the pressure they mounted against him.⁹

The deadlock continued through late May and early June until Quat, in desperation, obtained his cabinet's agreement to invite the generals to mediate the crisis. Finally, on 11 June, the generals met with the Prime Minister, his cabinet, the NLC, and Chief of State Suu, and decided that they would assume control of the government, whose civilian members would resign. The generals also dissolved the NLC, thus ending the "civil solution" to the governing of South Vietnam.¹⁰

Invested once more with plenary political power, the military leaders set out to form a new government. Deputy Ambassador Johnson commented on the "curious calm" that had settled over Saigon during the interregnum. The calm was explained as a time for reflection. Surveying the governmental chaos of the past months, the military could have few illusions about the ability of the civilians to rule Vietnam. The powerful religious groups, first the Buddhists and then the Catholics, had paralyzed the preceding governments. Among the young generals in particular there existed apparently the belief that the "real revolution" promised by the overthrow of the Diem regime had been denied the people. Ambassador Johnson identified these theoreticians as General Ky, Colonel Phan Van Lieu and, perhaps, Corps Commander Thi. These men, along with several of their

9. (S) Msg, Saigon 4053 to State, 4 Jun 65, JCS IN
89573. (S) Msg, Saigon 4079 to State, 5 Jun 65, JCS IN
91164. (S) Msg, Saigon 4098 to State, 7 Jun 65, JCS IN
95724.
10. (C) Msg, Saigon 4157 to State 11 Jun 65, JCS IN
98876.

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fellow officers and civilian politicians, shared certain characteristics: they were younger men, mostly from central or north Vietnam, who shared an intellectual affinity with Buddhist leader Tri Quang; their attitude was strongly nationalistic with overtones of xenophobia; they had a sense of disillusion with what was regarded as the recent experiment with the democratic way of life; they wanted decisive governmental action producing immediate, concrete results; and they were authoritarian, tending to oversimplify the complexity of government, and questioning the ability of the antiquated bureaucracy to perform the necessary governmental functions.

These military leaders also had a conception of the kind of government that would fulfill their notion of a "real revolution." It would be lean, simplified and authoritarian, led by younger men whose prime purpose would be to gear the nation for war. Ambassador Johnson considered it noteworthy that such disparate national figures as Father Hoang Quynh and Tri Quang seemed prepared to support such a government.¹¹

On 14 June, the RVNAF published Decision Number Three outlining the new government. Authority was vested in the generals in concert as a Congress of the Armed Forces, whose membership, like the old AFC, included all RVNAF general officers. Below this body and created by it was a ten-member directory, the Council for Leadership of the Nation, chaired by Major General Nguyen Van Thieu. This chief policy-making body was composed of Capital and Corps Commanders, the CJGS, the Minister of Defense, a Secretary-General, and Vice Air Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky as Commissioner for the Executive, or Prime Minister. The Prime Minister would select a cabinet responsible to the Council for Leadership, which would lay down the government's policies. The RVNAF promised to "hand over power to the people's elected representatives the day security and order are re-established, liberty assured, and the Communists completely crushed." On 19 June Prime Minister Ky presented his cabinet and announced a 26-point program to place the country on a

11. (S) Msg, Saigon 4173 to State, 13 Jun 65, JCS IN 10968.

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war footing. In trips to Hue and Nha Trang in the days following his ascension to power, Ky reiterated his themes of austerity, integrity, and mobilization for victory.¹²

The inauguration of the Ky government brought a surface calm to the South Vietnam political scene during the remaining months of 1965, but the internal issues that had confronted previous governments continued to plague Ky. The Montagnard problem rose again in the late summer and autumn; inflation and commodity shortages provided the government's political enemies with a "safe" weapon for criticism; the pacification program languished; and while the powerful religious groups were quiet, rumors of both Catholic and Buddhist plots and planned coups circulated in South Vietnam. After the first 100 days of the Ky government, in late September, Henry Cabot Lodge (who had replaced Maxwell Taylor as the US Ambassador in Saigon in August) observed that the Vietnamese were still largely "fence sitters," with the various political groups waiting to see how the government performed. However, by the end of the year, although his government was still subject to political pressures, the stability of Ky's government was improving. He had strengthened his position on the international scene through visits to Taiwan, Malaysia, and Thailand, and if he sometimes exercised power at home in an unorthodox fashion, at least he did not present a political vacuum. In a beleaguered nation which had not been free of domestic disorder and coups since 1963, survival of a government structure and leaders for seven months was a major achievement. Most important for both South Vietnam and the United States, the Ky government willingly cooperated in the massive infusion of US forces and materiel in South Vietnam during 1965.¹³

12. (U) Msg, Saigon 4192 to State 14 Jun 65, JCS IN 11441. (S) Msg, Saigon 4266 to State, 18 Jun 65, JCS IN 17671. (U) Msg, MACV to NMCC, 19 Jun 65, JCS IN 19130; (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 18-19.

13. (S NOFORN) DIA Bulletin 151-65, 5 Aug 65, p. F-4, 166-65, 26 Aug 65, p. F-2, and 167-65, 27 Aug 65, p. F-2. (S-GP 4) Msg, Saigon 1140 to State, 2 Oct 65. (S) Msg, State 610 to Saigon, 1 Sep 65. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 1532 to State, 2 Nov 65. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 19-20.

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Economic Problems

Among the many internal problems facing the GVN in 1965, one of the most serious was spiraling inflation. Commodity shortages and a sharply rising cost of living had been problems since 1962, but by 1965 they had reached serious proportions. The cost of rice offered an example of this inflation. In January 1965, the wholesale price per 100 kilograms was 590 piasters. By May the price for the same amount had risen to 700 piasters.¹⁴

At the end of 1965, the cost of food in South Vietnam was 41 percent higher than a year earlier. A general price index showed that the cost of living for working class families had increased by 33 percent in 1965 and 30 percent for middle class families. Both GVN and US officials thought that these figures understated the actual increase.¹⁵

The causes of this inflation were several--the large GVN budget deficit; the rising piaster expenditures of the United States for official purposes, particularly military construction; and the increased piaster spending by US troops. All of these factors produced a growing money supply, but there was no comparable increase in commodity supply to meet the expanding purchasing power. Domestic production and supply declined owing to VC disruption both at the sources of production and in transport to market. Another factor hampering the available commodity supply in South Vietnam was the congestion of ports, where lack of facilities and inadequate management resulted in long waits to unload cargos and the buildup of large demurrage charges. The economic problem facing the GVN was essentially a situation where increased income combined with supply problems drove up prices and increased wages in an ascending spiral.¹⁶

By mid-1965, it was apparent to the United States that the inflation in Vietnam could have serious consequences on

14. (28-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 18-19.

15. Ibid.

16. (S) ASD(ISA) Paper, "Inflation in Vietnam," Encl to (28) Memo, Dir., Far East Region, ASD(ISA) to DepSecDef and Spec. Asst. to SecDef (Yarmolinsky), 24 Dec 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 65.

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the conduct of the war as well as on the political stability of the urban population. The enormous US force buildup scheduled for the remainder of 1965 and 1966 and the necessary construction of facilities to support the increased US troops would greatly accelerate the inflationary spiral unless adequate measures were taken to meet the problem. Consequently, US officials in both Saigon and Washington undertook consideration of actions to eliminate economic problems impeding the war, including measures that might involve direct US action in areas where the GVN failed to act effectively or expeditiously. This was a change in the policy previously adhered to of working through and assisting the GVN in pursuing its normal governmental functions.¹⁷

In an effort to reduce US troop spending in RVN, the United States and the GVN jointly introduced the Military Payment Certificate (MPC) Program for South Vietnam on 31 August 1965. The program removed US currency from US personnel in South Vietnam and was designed to check price increases, protect the GVN national monetary sovereignty and increase GVN foreign reserves, consolidate the value and rate of exchange of the piaster, eliminate the foreign exchange black market, and stop leakage of foreign currency into the hands of the VC. Under the Program, all US military and civilian personnel were paid in MPCs which could be used only for purchases in US facilities or for purchases of piasters from US disbursing officers. In addition, the Program forbade the possession of foreign currency in Vietnam and prohibited the possession of MPCs by unauthorized persons.¹⁸

It was quickly apparent that the MPC Program would not sufficiently check US troop spending to have any appreciable effect in blunting inflation. On 14 November, a MACV commanders conference considered various additional measures including plans to increase the GVN import program with US

17. (72) US Embassy, Saigon, Memo for Record, "Discussion of Economic and Political Questions," 16 Jul 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 65.

18. (9) ASD(ISA) Paper, "Military Troop Spending," Encl to (U) Memo, Dir., Far East Region, ASD(ISA) to DepSecDef et al., 27 Dec 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 65.

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assistance, a special currency fund for personal conversion of US dollars, and limiting the GVN budget to essential requirements.¹⁹

In December the DoD and the AID reviewed actions already taken and additional actions that might be taken. This review reported a number of positive actions. In the area of eliminating port congestion, several actions had been or would be taken, including the following: use of fully loaded ships for RVN ports; the establishment of a Transport Movement Agency in Saigon to coordinate port activities; provision of additional lighterage and LSTs to COMUSMACV; construction of additional port facilities; provision of additional Transportation Terminal Service, boat, and truck units; and contractual arrangements for discharge and coastal movement of cargo. With regard to the military construction program for Vietnam, an area that the State Department believed would be a chief source of inflation in 1966, the Assistant Secretary of Defense (I&L) reported that the construction program had been reduced to "the minimum essential" to support operational plans and that any further reduction would restrict operations. The Assistant Secretary of Defense (M) found that "considerable progress" had been made in expanding the number, variety, and accessibility of US-supported facilities, such as clubs, messes, recreation centers, exchanges, movie theatres, and concessionaries, where US troops could buy goods rather than going out on the local market to do so. In an effort to relieve the pressure on the civil construction program caused by the location of large headquarters elements in and adjacent to population centers, the Secretary of Defense approved the construction of the MACV Consolidated Support Facility to combine into one compound the major MACV Headquarters and support activities in the Saigon area. In addition, a number of projects, although not yet approved, were under active consideration in Washington as the year ended. These included: the assignment of an economic advisor to COMUSMACV's staff; a campaign for voluntary troop savings; simplification of procedures for transferring troop pay to the United States other than by allotment to a specified individual; increasing the number

19. (28-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 21-22.

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of R&R trips out-of-country as well as to special US-supported facilities in-country; and restricting the access of troops to the local market place.²⁰

Despite the US efforts to check US government and troop spending in South Vietnam, by the end of 1965 there were few signs that the inflationary trend would be even moderately checked. In fact, most signs pointed to an even more serious inflationary problem in South Vietnam in 1966.

The Montagnard Problem

Adding to the internal woes of the GVN in 1965 was the Montagnard question. In an effort to eliminate Montagnard grievances, General Khanh had issued a decree on 17 October 1964 granting concessions to the Montagnards in the form of reinstitution of tribal courts, a revised draft law, a practical system of land distribution, relaxation of school fees and entrance requirements and authorization for use of tribal languages in elementary education. The political instability in Saigon during the months following the Khanh decree prevented the GVN from fulfilling the pledges to the Montagnards, and in 1965, they continued to chafe under what they considered GVN discrimination and neglect.²¹

With their increasing disillusionment over the GVN's failure to keep its pledges, the Montagnards found an opportunity to force the government to be more attentive to their problems in the Front Unifie de Lutte de la Race Opprimee (FULRO). Created on 1 August 1964, FULRO was a mountain tribal political organization, free of NLF domination and composed largely of Montagnards, that demanded full independence from the RVN. Most of the 35 Montagnard tribes were represented in the FULRO movement, with the heaviest participation coming from the Rhade tribe which had over

20. (S) Fact Sheets, Encls to (S) Memo, Dir, Far East Region, ASD(ISA) to Mr. Rutherford Poats, 28 Dec 65, CCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 65.

21. (S) COMUSMACV Command History, 1964, pp. 122-124. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 347.

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2,000 men in the FULRO armed forces. Y Bham, the hereditary Rhade leader, was one of the principal organizers of FULRO.²²

The position of the United States with respect to the GVN and the Montagnard question was a delicate one. The relationship between the GVN and the Montagnards was a problem only the GVN could solve, but as the US commitment in Vietnam grew and US casualties increased, it became embarrassing for the United States to explain to its public and allies how the GVN could allow their major efforts to be weakened by this problem. In early April 1965, President Johnson approved, as one of 41 nonmilitary measures to assist the GVN, a US effort to persuade the GVN to follow through on the steps begun by Khanh to meet Montagnard grievances.²³

On 29 July FULRO forces seized the CIDG camp at Buen Brieng, but withdrew four days later in the face of ARVN pressure. After this event, the US Mission Council in Saigon considered various alternative US approaches to the Montagnard situation, and decided to urge the GVN to continue a policy of negotiation and conciliation and to offer the FULRO incentives for allegiance to the government. Throughout the remainder of the year, US Mission members strove to impress on GVN officials the necessity for avoiding military clashes that could rally the Montagnards around FULRO and for convincing the Montagnards of GVN concern for their well-being.²⁴

Despite US efforts, FULRO attempted a second revolt on 18 December, seizing the province headquarters at Gia Nghia. Simultaneously with the Gia Nghia seizure, the Montagnards killed 32 GVN troops at Phu Thien. Again, ARVN forces quickly suppressed the uprising and the GVN

22. Bernard B. Fall, The Two Vietnams (1967), pp. 488-489. (S-GP 3) CINCPAC Command History, 1964, p. 378. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 347.

23. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecState to Pres. n.d., Encl to JCS 2343/552, 26 Mar 65, JMF 9155.3 (26 Mar 65). (TS) NSAM 328, 6 Apr 65, Encl to JCS 2343/566, 7 Apr 65, JMF 9155.3 (6 Apr 65).

24. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 350-352.

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sent out teams to the Montagnards to explain government policies and to expose the "falsehoods" of FULRO propaganda. By the end of the year, the GVN had resolved the immediate Montagnard crisis, but the broader problem of integrating these primitive mountain tribes into Vietnamese society remained to trouble the GVN in the coming year.²⁵

Pacification

A program of continuing concern and serious challenge to the GVN in 1965 was the pacification effort. The GVN pacification program had made little progress in 1964, and despite ambitious GVN plans and substantial US assistance, the pacification effort continued to languish in 1965.

Little progress had been made in securing areas under VC control and protecting the population of these areas from VC terrorism. As early as November 1964, both General Westmoreland and Ambassador Taylor were concerned over the faulty organization and lagging achievement of the program. Plans were announced and then not implemented; political jockeying diverted the attention of officials and military commanders; and riots and demonstrations of student and religious groups compounded the instability. What was needed, COMUSMACV felt, were major changes to stiffen the GVN and give forward momentum to pacification.²⁶

The political turmoil in Saigon during December, January, and February thwarted any attempts to improve the pacification effort, and the GVN did not act on the problem until early April. A joint US Mission Council/GVN Internal Security Council meeting on 2 April 1965 approved a revised pacification organization, and Prime Minister Quat promulgated this revision in a government decree of 5 April. Under the new plan, the official term "pacification" was dropped in favor of "rural reconstruction" (Prime Minister Ky redesignated the program "rural construction" on 30 July 1965). The rural reconstruction program was to be guided by a top council, the Central Rural Reconstruction Council (CRRC) chaired by the Prime Minister, and including the Deputy Prime Minister, thereby involving the top government

25. Ibid., pp. 348-349.

26. Ibid., p. 229.

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officials in the program. The Directorate General for Rural Reconstruction (DGRR) would be the operating arm of the CRRC. US coordination for rural reconstruction would be furnished through the US Mission Liaison Group composed of representatives of MACV, USOM, CAS, JUSPAO, and the Embassy political section. It would meet informally with the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister and would work closely with the DGRR.²⁷

The most ambitious approach to rural reconstruction/construction in 1965 was the Hop Tac concept. The Hop Tac area was divided into four roughly concentric zones with Saigon/Cholon serving as the hub. By use of the "oil spot" approach, the Government would extend its influence outwards into the four zones, eliminating the VC forces and political organizations, neutralizing the VC productive, economic, and financial activities, and providing control and security for the population.²⁸

Despite both GVN and US enthusiasm for the Hop Tac program and the new pacification organization, rural reconstruction had made no significant progress by mid-year. On 25 June 1965, figures provided by the sector advisors showed that, during the previous year period, the GVN had lost control of an additional 6.2 percent of the population. The GVN now controlled 45.9 percent of the population. The VC controlled 23.5 percent of the population, an increase of 6.2 percent, with a peak increase of 2.8 percent occurring in June 1965. While the GVN had made some gains in the Hop Tac area in the III CTZ, and in the IV CTZ, it had lost significant areas in I and II CTZs and in the northern and eastern regions of III CTZ.²⁹

General Westmoreland found several major reasons for the lack of success in the rural reconstruction program. The frequent changes of government had caused changes in the personnel and organization of the GVN ministries with ensuing delays in decisions. The political chaos also brought rapid turnover in the personnel within the rural reconstruction organization, further slowing the program.

27. Ibid., p. 230. (S) Briefing, Edward Lansdale (Spec. Asst. to Amb.) for SecDef, 29 Nov 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65.

28. (S-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 231-232.

29. Ibid., pp. 235-236. (S-GP 1) DIA Spec. Intell. Supp., SIS-267-65, Jul 65.

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The deteriorating military and security situation had necessitated the transfer of many ARVN units from clear-and-hold missions to defensive positions. However, General Westmoreland also believed that the lack of success of the program was somewhat exaggerated by faulty evaluation criteria. For example, some areas originally declared secure or cleared did not meet the secure criteria as later defined.³⁰

By late summer, US authorities recognized the need for a pacification program in South Vietnam that would capitalize on the success achieved by the US/ARVN troops against main force VC units. CINCPAC urged more active US participation in the program. COMUSMACV, on the other hand, favored continued pressure on the GVN to improve its existing program. He thought that, although the Hop Tac program had not progressed as rapidly as had been hoped, its primary objective of securing the national complex (Saigon/Cholon and six surrounding provinces) had been partially achieved. General Westmoreland recommended an approach of quiet persuasion to the GVN, adding that US concepts and anxiety could not be forcibly imposed on the GVN leaders. The COMUSMACV view prevailed, and in the following months, US officials pursued a policy of quiet persuasion with the GVN.³¹

The outlook for pacification/rural reconstruction was still not promising at the end of 1965. An indication of the static condition of the pacification was the status of the Hop Tac program. During the year the GVN had extended its influence in the Hop Tac area from 38 to 43 percent of the land area, but the VC had expanded the territory under their control in the same area from 37 to 44 percent (the gains to both sides had come from areas originally in dispute). The Secretary of Defense was also pessimistic. During a visit to RVN in late November he had voiced the belief that:

I don't think we have done a . . . thing we can point to that's been effective in five years. I ask you to show me one area in this country, in the five years that I have been associated with it, that we have pacified.

30. (70-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 238-240.

31. Ibid., pp. 240-241.

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General Westmoreland was more sanguine. He thought it would be more appropriate to evaluate pacification progress during 1965 in terms of the changes and refinement in concepts, planning, and organization rather than strictly in terms of territory and population control. He pointed out that significant progress had been made in the areas of GVN initiative and planning, more definitive policies, more aggressive attitudes, and greater efficiency and flexibility at the lower levels. Nevertheless, it was obvious to all concerned that a significant improvement in the pacification effort was necessary in the coming year if the GVN was to become a viable, popularly supported government capable of carrying on the war at the level planned by the United States.³²

In an attempt to improve the pacification situation, the GVN presented a new program, the 1966 rural construction plan, at a US/GVN Council meeting on 5 November 1965. The key features of this program, which would go into effect in January, included construction of additional hamlets in priority areas and organization of rural construction cadres into armed groups with propaganda, civil affairs, and civil action functions. Cadre teams were to be specially trained at the National Training Center at Vung Tau, and 40,000 qualified personnel were expected to be available by the end of 1966. Cadre teams would be assigned to a village for six to twelve months rather than just a few weeks, as had previously been the case. The 1966 program designated Quang Nam in I CTZ, Binh Dinh in II CTZ, and An Giang in IV CTZ, priority areas. The plan also included revision of rural construction administration. A Senior Rural Construction Council, chaired by the Prime Minister and including the Minister of Defense, the CJGS, the Corps commanders, and the NP, would oversee the plan. Councils would also be established at the Corps, division, and province levels to prepare and review plans and action for their areas of responsibility. The US Mission Council termed the 1966 GVN plan "the most intelligent and practical approach to the problem of pacification thus far." But, as in the previous plans and programs, the actual test would be in its achievements.³³

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 229, 248.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 243-244. (S) Briefing, Edward Lansdale (Spec. Asst. to Amb.) for SecDef, 29 Nov 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 65.

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In spite of many problems, the GVN was stronger at the end of 1965 than it had been at the beginning of the year. In place of the revolving door governments of January and February, there was in December a functioning government that had been in office for six months. Whether it was a government capable of meeting the internal problems in South Vietnam and at the same time carrying on the war was another question. The GVN was a military government led by the flamboyant and unpredictable Marshal Ky. It was a government that, at best estimates, controlled only half of the territory of South Vietnam, and it was a government that had yet to demonstrate any popular backing. It was a government racked by spiraling inflation and beset with dissident minorities. It was a government that still had to prove itself.

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Chapter 28

THE SEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL SOLUTION - 1965

One of the major objectives of the national policy toward Vietnam was aimed at forcing NVN, through forms of carefully controlled military pressures, to halt its support of the insurgencies in RVN and Laos. Implicit in this policy was the understanding that, once the United States was satisfied that the enemy had indeed responded properly and adequately, its military actions against NVN would cease. US officials had not agreed upon exactly what constituted a proper and adequate response or just what steps would be taken once such a stage was recognized. The enemy might respond only by a gradual lessening of support to the VC. Such action might constitute only a tacit understanding unsupported by real controls or checks. Or it might come in the form of diplomatic overtures with all the subsequent actions that these would involve.

In 1965 the Administration remained constantly on the alert for signs of a change in enemy attitudes or actions that might signify a response. Beyond that, US spokesmen publicly importuned the communists for an indication that they were disposed to seek a peaceful solution and, as in mid-May, took positive action to elicit such an indication. As the year went on, pressures from public opinion at home and abroad and international initiatives were brought to bear upon the United States to seek a peaceful solution to the war. Of real concern to US military leaders was the possibility that the nation's political leaders might, at some point, be moved to attempt some form of negotiations without regard to the comparative military positions of friendly and enemy forces, and before there were guarantees that the enemy would give up his attempt to conquer RVN.

The enemy, meanwhile, alternately ignored, denounced, or simply rebuffed overtures for a mutual effort toward a peaceful solution. He did set his own terms, but they were so far out of line with announced US objectives that it was doubtful the enemy seriously believed that the United States would accept them in the foreseeable future.

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Secretary Rusk set the tone for US attitudes on peaceful settlement at the beginning of the year when he stated on 3 January that if the communists in Southeast Asia would "leave their neighbors alone" US forces would come home, and "all sorts of political possibilities" would open up to bring "that situation to a peaceful conclusion." He underscored, however, that if the communists remained determined to press into Southeast Asia, it would be difficult to see how a political settlement could be reached.¹

Ambassador Taylor's Views

Shortly after the first of the year, when the United States was approaching Phase II of its program to force NVN to stop its support of the VC, Ambassador Taylor raised the question of "negotiations" in a limited sense, but his discussion centered on the nature of US/GVN objectives in a settlement of the war and the means of achieving them. Largely in a philosophical vein, the Ambassador examined whether settlement would involve "a return to the Geneva Accords" or a new international settlement would be necessary, and what terms should be demanded of NVN in return for cessation of action against it.²

Following the initial US reprisals in February, and concurrently with his recommendations for further "graduated reprisals," the Ambassador on 11 February again raised the question of "negotiation." This time he was somewhat more explicit, saying that a return to the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962 would avoid the pitfalls of new conferences and have the advantage of "avoiding negotiations." Conceivably, if US pressure were strong enough, NVN might tacitly agree to stop its support, confirming this later with "GVN/DRV negotiations at the military level." Adoption of such an approach by NVN would also have the advantage of keeping the United States out of direct negotiations with the DRV. At this stage, the Ambassador was speaking in terms of "cessation of reprisal attacks" as the reward for NVN accession to GVN/US demands. The demands that he

1. Statement, Mr. Rusk on TV Interv, 3 Jan 65, Dept of State Bulletin, III (18 Jan 65), p. 65.

2. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2445 to State, 9 Feb 65, JCS IN 19338.

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proposed be made, when appropriate, involved generally a return to the Geneva Accords. He suggested that military representatives of GVN and NVN might meet in the DMZ under ICC auspices, with US observers present.³

Ambassador Taylor, on 26 February, reported that the consensus reached at a SEACoord meeting of US Ambassadors was that

. . . while, for other audiences, it may be felt necessary frequently to reiterate our willingness to talk and, of course, negotiations may be in fact necessary at some stage, too much reference, especially publicly to our 'willingness to negotiate' causes confusion in SVN, Thailand, and Laos, as well as distortion in the signal we are seeking to convey to Hanoi, Peking and Moscow.

The ambassadors had learned, said Ambassador Taylor, that in the local context, "to negotiate" had come to mean to set up a neutralist or coalition government as opposed to seeing the war through to a satisfactory conclusion. The United States must convince friends and enemies alike of its firm resolve to achieve its objectives. To bring the matter before the UN Security Council for solution would only place the Soviet Government in the position of having to defend the NVN, a role it probably would wish to avoid, especially in view of the great Chinese Communist influence on Hanoi. China stood to gain from continued NVN involvement in the south and would seek to prevent any settlement. Should the Soviets replace Communist China as the main support of NVN a political settlement would become more likely.⁴

Ambassador Taylor also stated that, while countries seeking a neutralist settlement would undoubtedly press hard for a negotiated solution which would fall short of US objectives, the United States should resist, seeking to divert such pressure to Hanoi, Peking, and Moscow as the real villains in the piece.⁵

3. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2495 to State, 11 Feb 65, JCS IN 22678.

4. (TS) Msg, Saigon 2762 to State, 26 Feb 65, JCS IN 42147.

5. Ibid.

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On 8 March, UN Secretary General U Thant issued an appeal to the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, North Vietnam, Communist China, and South Vietnam, to convene a seven power conference as a step toward ending the war in Vietnam. The United States turned down the suggestion, saying in essence that NVN aggression must halt before any conference would be considered.⁶

The JCS Position

As these ideas and suggestions were evolving, the Joint Chiefs of Staff established their own position on negotiations. On 15 March they advised the Secretary of Defense that it was vital for the United States and GVN that at the very minimum there should be no attempt to enter negotiations until their forces had gained a strong military advantage. Further, the minimum acceptable terms for any negotiated settlement must be that NVN cease its support of the insurgencies in RVN and Laos. Should negotiations take place, the United States, the RVN, and the RLG must not lose the contest at the conference table. If the enemy side stalled or displayed intransigence, thus dragging out negotiations (as had been the case in Korea), military pressures against them should be increased in NVN, RVN, and Laos. Although realizing that the RLG would have to be associated at some point with any negotiations, bilateral negotiations between RVN and NVN would be preferable to a Geneva-type conference where the participants could resort to propaganda or bring up matters not germane to the purposes of the conference. The communists could be expected to resist bilateral talks. The United States must not count on the USSR either as a mediator or as a communications channel to Hanoi or NVN, since it would advance its own interests at US expense whenever possible.⁷

One of the main problems in any negotiations would be to develop effective safeguards to make sure that any agreements achieved were carried out. The enemy would probably insist strongly on the inclusion of the NLF in any future GVN. But the Joint Chiefs of Staff were definitely opposed to the participation of the NLF in negotiations.

6. NY Times, 9 Mar 65, 10 Mar 65.

7. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-180-65 to SecDef, 15 Mar 65 (derived from JCS 2339/175), JMF 9155 (22 Jan 65).

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They did not expect the communists to give up easily on this point unless US/GVN military pressures were overwhelming. The 1954 Geneva Accord provisions for "free general elections" must be set aside, since current conditions precluded the reunification of Vietnam. The ICC must be set up in a manner that would allow it to function effectively in Vietnam, and any negotiated settlement must include appropriate deadlines for ceasefire, withdrawal of forces and materiel, and safeguards (in addition to the ICC) to ensure positively that the terms of settlement were carried out. Particularly difficult would be the withdrawal of US forces as a "quid pro quo" for communist withdrawal. As had been demonstrated in 1954, NVN could withdraw its troops but leave behind strong VC forces.

In conclusion the JCS recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the "US/RVN/RLG not enter into negotiations with the communists until a strong military position has been achieved, to include a reasonable indication that DRV intervention in the RVN and Laos has ceased." They asked that their views be considered in the development of a US position on settlement of the Southeast Asia conflict.⁸

The Presidential Offer

On 15 March, 17 nations, terming themselves "non-aligned Nations," passed a resolution at Belgrade that an appeal be made to the United States and other nations concerned in Vietnam calling for a peaceful settlement. Ten days later the President announced in a White House press release that he was ready to go anywhere at any time and meet with anyone whenever there was a promise of progress toward an honorable peace. "We have said many times," he continued, ". . . to all who are interested in our principles for honorable negotiation--that we seek no more than a return to the essentials of the agreements of 1954--a reliable arrangement to guarantee the independence and security of all in Southeast Asia."⁹

The appeal of the 17 "non-aligned Nations" was delivered to Secretary Rusk for the President on 1 April. The United

8. Ibid.

9. Statement, Pres. Johnson, 25 Mar 65, Dept of State Bulletin, III (12 Apr 65), pp. 527-528.

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States turned down the appeal, but the President took the opportunity to spell out for these nations on 8 April that "Peace in Southeast Asia demands an independent South Vietnam -- securely guaranteed and able to shape its own relationships to all others -- free from outside interference -- tied to no alliance -- a military base for no other country."¹⁰

Within a week after his decision to commit US ground forces to "counterinsurgency combat operations" the President on 7 April made an important policy address at Johns Hopkins University in which he emphasized the US determination with respect to Southeast Asia. He then stated:

. . . it should also be clear that the only path for reasonable men is the path of peaceful settlement. Such peace demands an independent South Vietnam -- securely guaranteed and able to shape its own relationships to all others -- free from outside interference -- tied to no alliance -- a military base for no other country. These are the essentials of any final settlement. We will never be second in the search for such a peaceful settlement in Viet-Nam. There may be many ways to this kind of peace: in discussion or negotiations with the governments concerned; in large groups or in small ones; in the reaffirmation of old agreements or their strengthening with new ones. We have stated this position over and over again 50 times and more to friend and foe alike. And we remain ready with this purpose for unconditional discussions.

But he warned the communists: "We will not be defeated. We will not grow tired. We will not withdraw, either openly or under the cloak of a meaningless agreement."¹¹

10. This appeal was also delivered on 1 Apr 65 to the Secretary General of the UN, and to Canada, Communist China, Poland, USSR, the United Kingdom, NVN and RVN, as well as to the NLF. Dept of State Bulletin, LII (26 Apr 65), pp. 610-612.

11. Speech at Johns Hopkins Univ, Pres. Johnson, 7 Apr 65, Dept of State Bulletin, LII (26 Apr 65), pp. 606-610.

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In the same address the President proposed a huge program of US economic assistance to the nations of South-east Asia, including NVN.

The official NVN news agency rejected the President's offer of unconditional discussions on 11 April and called his proposed economic program the "bait" of "stupid pirates."

Hanoi's Four Points

Two days later, Premier Pham Van Dong of NVN stated that it was the unswerving policy of his government to respect strictly the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam and to implement their basic provisions as embodied in what soon became known as Hanoi's four points:

1) Recognition of the basic national rights of the Vietnamese people--peace, independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity. According to the Geneva Agreements, the U.S. Government must withdraw from South Vietnam U.S. troops, military personnel and weapons of all kinds, dismantle all U.S. military bases there, and cancel its 'military alliance' with South Vietnam. It must end its policy of intervention and aggression in South Vietnam. According to the Geneva Agreements, the U.S. Government must stop its acts of war against North Vietnam, completely cease all encroachments on the territory and sovereignty of the DRV. 2) Pending the peaceful reunification of Vietnam, while Vietnam is still temporarily divided into two zones, the military provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam must be strictly respected--the two zones must refrain from joining any military alliance with foreign countries, there must be no foreign military bases, or military personnel in their respective territory. 3) The internal affairs of South Vietnam must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves in accordance with the program of the NFLSV without any foreign interference. 4) The peaceful reunification of Vietnam is to be settled by the Vietnamese people in both zones, without any foreign interference.¹²

12. "Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam," S. Com. on Foreign Relations, Mar 68, 90th Cong, 2nd Sess (1968), p. 302. (Hereafter cited as "Background Information Relating to SE Asia and Vietnam," S. Com. on Foreign Relations, Mar 68.)

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More JCS Views on Negotiations

On 7 May, Ambassador Taylor, in preparation for discussions with GVN, submitted a list of questions, with suggested answers, dealing with US/GVN objectives in the war and with specific ways of reaching a peaceful settlement in Vietnam. After studying these questions and answers, the JCS found that intervening developments had not changed their basic views; indeed, the views submitted on 15 March had been strengthened by events. They again urged the Secretary of Defense that no effort be made to negotiate until US/GVN forces had achieved a strong military advantage. And they proposed that, even should negotiations or discussions take place, the military pressures on the enemy be continued. While the Ambassador had, in his list, postulated minimum and maximum conditions under which the US/GVN would be willing to cut back air attacks and reduce US forces in RVN, the Joint Chiefs of Staff held out little hope that these conditions would be attained.

The United States must view any negotiations on the Vietnam problem in the context of the future US posture throughout SEAsia and the Western Pacific. We must maintain a position of strength to thwart communist aggression and expansion in these areas.

They agreed with the Ambassador that a "tacit agreement" might eventuate in RVN, pointing out that the insurgencies in Greece, Malaya and the Philippines had ended with such an arrangement. While desirable from the US/GVN standpoint to have the insurgents surface and lay down their arms, it might not be practicable.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff observed that it also might not be feasible to insist that NVN dissolve the NLF. The immediate US objectives, which in turn would foster the attainment of other objectives, would be reached when NVN ceased its interference in RVN and Laos and when the VC stopped their insurgency. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the US make no further offers to the enemy of economic development, at least until NVN responded favorably to the President's standing offer of 7 April. To do so might be construed as a sign of weakness. With regard to inspection and control measures and to withdrawal of US

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troops, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended very careful examination of both problems before entering into any agreements with the communists.¹³

The Secretary of Defense passed these views to the Secretary of State.¹⁴

Confidential Diplomatic Efforts -- 10-20 May

While the Joint Chiefs of Staff were considering Ambassador Taylor's questions, the United States had, in connection with the bombing pause, carried out confidential diplomatic efforts to establish a positive contact with Hanoi. On 10 May, President Johnson informed Ambassador Taylor that he had decided to suspend ROLLING THUNDER operations for about a week. His purposes were to influence world opinion in favor of the United States and, depending on communist reaction, to seek peace or to take increased military action.¹⁵ Secretary Rusk personally informed Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, on the evening of 11 May, of the planned voluntary cessation of bombing. He instructed US Ambassador in Moscow Kohler, to convey to the NVN Ambassador in Moscow as soon as possible the fact of the cessation and the reasons therefore. Basically NVN was to be told that the United States would watch very carefully to see if there were "significant reductions" in armed actions by forces "whose actions can be decisively affected from North Vietnam." Hanoi was to be warned, however, not to misinterpret the temporary suspension as an indication of weakness and that even stronger attacks might result from any such misinterpretation. Kohler would tell the NVN Ambassador that the United States was hopeful that there would be no such misunderstanding and that this first pause in the air attacks might meet with a response which would permit further and more extended suspension of bombings in the expectation of equally constructive actions by the other side in the future.¹⁶

13. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-394-65 to SecDef, 20 May 65 (derived from JCS 2343/595), JMF 9155.3 (7 May 65).

14. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 26 May 65, Att to JCS 2343/595-1, 1 Jun 65, JMF 9155.3 (7 May 65).

15. (TS) Msg, Pres Johnson to Amb Taylor, State 2553, 10 May 65.

16. (TS) Msg, State 3103 to Moscow, 11 May 65.

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ROLLING THUNDER operations were suspended effective 2400, 12 May, Saigon time. The efforts of Ambassador Kohler and, later, of other emissaries, to establish direct communication on this matter with NVN officials met with failure. Kohler first sought, without success, to see the NVN Ambassador in Moscow. When the NVN Embassy was informed that Kohler had a message of extreme importance to NVN, it was suggested that he transmit it through the Soviet Government in its capacity as Geneva Co-chairman. When Kohler approached Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, the highest official he could reach in the Soviet Government, the Russian refused flatly to transmit the message, saying that NVN had made no request of his government to serve as an intermediary. He suggested that Kohler find his own way of delivering the message. Kohler then delivered a copy of the message to the DRV Embassy, handing it to an employee who promised to get it to the Ambassador. The message was returned on the next morning, 13 May, in a plain envelope addressed to Embassy, US of A. Regardless of his failure to make direct contact, Kohler reported to the Secretary of State on 13 May that he believed the message had actually gotten into NVN hands.

In order to make doubly sure that NVN had received the message, however, the United States sought help from the British, asking that the British representative in Hanoi attempt to convey the message directly to the DRV there. On 18 May the British Embassy informed Secretary Rusk that the British Consul General in Hanoi had submitted the message to his "usual contact" who accepted it but returned it to the Consul General soon thereafter, ostensibly unopened.

The official US view of this effort was that its reception by both the Soviet Union and NVN was not merely negative but hostile. Instructing several Ambassadors to inform appropriate officials in their respective countries of the failure of this attempt, Secretary Rusk stated, "In view of the complete absence of any constructive response we have decided the bombing must be resumed."¹⁷

On 19 May, an official of the US Embassy in Paris was approached by a source, ostensibly from within the French Foreign Office, and informed that on 18 May (Paris time),

17. (S) Msg, State 2425, to New Delhi et al., 18 May 65.

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just prior to the resumption of bombings, the head of the NVN delegation in Paris, Mai Van Bo, had made "a fairly pressing approach at the Quai" on the matter of negotiation. The French source believed that Bo was making this approach on orders sent from Hanoi as the result of the suspension of US bombings. The essentials of the approach made by Bo were: Indian proposals for a "cordon sanitaire" on the 17th Parallel were not acceptable to Hanoi; the four points set forth by NVN on 8 April were not to be considered prior conditions but rather as working principles for negotiation.¹⁸

On 20 May, M. Lucet, Director of Political Affairs, French Foreign Office, called in the Deputy Chief of Mission of the American Embassy and transmitted officially the NVN "signal" to the United States. He said that his government had not been asked to convey the message but was doing so as a "friend and ally."

While in many respects Lucet's "signal" followed the lines of the reported message from Bo on the previous day, it contained an implication that the "four points" would have to be accepted as a basis for negotiation. Bo stressed that the "four points" of 8 April constituted the best base from which to find the "most just" solution, and that recognition of these principles would create favorable conditions for a Geneva-type conference. When asked if Hanoi recognized that the "withdrawal of American forces" would depend upon "conclusions of a negotiation," Bo said, "Exactly." He said that if agreement was reached on the "bases" the "ways and means" of application of "principles" would be found.¹⁹

Even as the French official was passing on this cryptic signal from Hanoi, the Prime Minister of India, visiting the Soviet Union, joined the Soviet Premier in demanding that the bombing of NVN cease and declared that the solution of the Vietnamese war could be found in the framework of the Geneva Agreements.²⁰

18. (~~S. NOFORN~~) Msg, Paris 6582 to State, 19 May 65.

19. (~~S. NOFORN~~) Msg, Paris 6612 to State, 20 May 65.

20. NY Times, 20 May 65.

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Further Proposals and Efforts

The President, in a speech of 25 June, called upon all of "the nations of the world to use all their influence, individually, and collectively, to bring to the tables those who seem determined to make war." The United States would, he promised, support their efforts.²¹

In a Voice of America broadcast on 4 July, the Secretary of State announced that the United States had on several occasions, acting through an intermediary, asked NVN what would happen if the United States stopped the bombing. ". . . we've never had a reply," he added.²²

On 15 July, US Ambassador W. Averell Harriman began informal talks in Moscow with Soviet Premier Kosygin. There is some evidence that in these meetings the Soviet official pressed for cessation of the bombing, intimating that should the United States do so, progress toward negotiations could be made.

The Secretary of State signalled a possible change in the US position on negotiation in mid-year when he told interviewers that the United States would not object to the presence of VC in the NVN delegation to any peace parley. He noted that neither Peiping or Hanoi had shown any interest in peace talks.

Turning to the NVN "four points," he singled out as "not acceptable to the South Vietnamese" or to the friends of the RVN the point that South Vietnam should be organized and resolved in accordance with the program of the NLF. "But," he added, "we should be glad to go to the conference table to take up those agreements of 1954 and 1962 to see where things went wrong, to try to bring the situation back to those basic agreements. . . ."

In a letter to the UN Secretary General, President Johnson on 28 July informed him that he had instructed US UN Representative Ambassador Goldberg to keep in close touch with him on the situation in Vietnam and asked him

21. San Francisco Address, Pres Johnson, 25 Jun 65, Dept of State Bulletin, LIII (19 Jul 65).

22. "Background Information Relating to SE Asia and Vietnam," S. Com on Foreign Relations, Mar 68, p. 22.

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for any helpful suggestions he might have "to strengthen our common search for the road to peace in Southeast Asia." U Thant told the President in reply that he would be happy to send him further suggestions when he had them.²³

U Thant presented his proposals for settlement of the war to the United States, NVN, RVN, and Communist China in mid-August. In doing so he noted that the Geneva Agreements seemed to offer the best road to a negotiated settlement, and that the stated positions of the parties involved seemed similar, at least in respect to the military neutralization of Vietnam and elections under international supervision. He called for a well-planned "cessation of all military operations by both sides" and involvement in the settlement of all those who were actually fighting.²⁴

State Department officials noted that U Thant's proposals slighted GVN and called for admission of NLF as a participant in any talks. They refuted his statement that the United States believed that internationally supervised elections would settle the political problems or that, if elections were held, the ICC was the proper body to supervise them. Although U Thant seemed to think it would occur, the United States had little evidence that NVN and NLF would uphold the political procedures of the Geneva Conference. Nor was the United States convinced of the advantages of cessation of all military operations prior to negotiations, since this would tend to weaken its position at any conference.²⁵

On 27 August Secretary Rusk replied to the Secretary General expressing general agreement with his view but adding that: 1) the United States would be "ready and eager to withdraw its forces from South Vietnam" when favorable conditions had been created; 2) neither "zone" of Vietnam should interfere in the affairs of the other; 3) troops and cadres infiltrated from the North must be withdrawn from RVN; 4) free and secret elections to determine unification of Vietnam "without interference from an

23. Ltr, Pres Johnson to UN Sec Gen, 28 Jul 65; Ltr, UN Sec Gen to Pres Johnson, 29 Jul 65; Dept of State Bulletin, LIII (16 Aug 65), p. 275.

24. (TS-GP 1) Msg, USUN 340 to State, 12 Aug 65, JCS IN 91711.

25. (TS-GP 1) Msg, State 432 to Saigon, 14 Aug 65.

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aggressive neighbor to the north" must be guaranteed. The United States remained prepared to engage in "unconditional discussions looking toward a peaceful settlement whenever the other side is ready."²⁶

Perhaps as a measure of the effectiveness of ROLLING THUNDER, in the summer of 1965 the United States began to receive communist demands for unilateral cessation of US bombing before any discussions leading to negotiations could even be considered. These were passed to the United States by both Soviet and Polish diplomats.²⁷

A British newspaper reported on 8 August, citing "unimpeachable sources," that the United States had rejected two NVN offers in 1963 and 1964 to discuss a peaceful settlement. This report tended to confirm earlier reports by UN sources that U Thant had tried twice, unsuccessfully, to bring about peace in RVN in November 1963 and in September 1964. On 15 November, Mr. Eric Sevareid, noted American journalist, wrote that in conversations with US UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson two days before the latter's death on 14 July, Mr. Stevenson had told him that U Thant had, in September 1964, passed on to him an offer from Hanoi to send an emissary to talk with a US representative in Rangoon. According to Mr. Sevareid's story the US decision on this offer had been postponed until after the US elections. After the elections of November 1964, and because of strong opposition from Secretary of Defense McNamara, Hanoi's alleged proposal was ignored by the United States. Sevareid reported that Stevenson told him, "U Thant was furious over the failure of his patient efforts. . . ."28

A State Department spokesman confirmed on 15 November that U Thant had urged the United States to accept the NVN offer of talks in Rangoon, but pointed out that there had been a spate of such reports and offers from third parties in contact with Hanoi. On the basis of other evidence the United States had not believed that NVN was ready at that time for serious peace talks. Secretary McNamara denied

26. (S) Msg, State 749 to Saigon, 14 Sep 65, JCS IN 48811.

27. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon to State 140310Z Aug 65, JCS IN 93755; (S-GP 4) Msg USUN 1689 to State, 1 Nov 65, JCS IN 32683.

28. Keessing's Contemporary Archives, 1966, p. 21349.

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the allegations in the Severeid article as "totally false" and said that now, as in 1964, he felt that the United States should search in every possible way for a peaceful settlement involving "unconditional discussions" at any time and any place. Secretary of State Rusk, in a press conference on 26 November, admitted that the Rangoon offer had been received as described by Severeid, but stated that the bulk of the evidence had led him to the conclusion that Hanoi had not been really serious and had, at the time it made its offer, been increasing its infiltration. Accordingly, the United States had not followed up the alleged offer.²⁹

On 1 December Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko told British Foreign Minister Stewart during a meeting that peace talks on Vietnam would be conditioned on the halting of the US air strikes against NVN and the withdrawal of US troops from RVN. A week later Ho Chi Minh, in an interview with a British journalist, called President Johnson's offer of unconditional talks "absolutely unacceptable."³⁰

The Italian Initiative

By this time, Foreign Minister Amintore Fanfani of Italy had already furnished to the President information that he claimed came directly from Ho Chi Minh and Pham Van Dong on 11 November, setting forth Hanoi's terms for beginning negotiations. These conditions reputedly included a ceasefire throughout Vietnam and a US agreement that it would accept the Geneva Agreements of 1954 as the basis for the negotiations. However, these terms defined the Geneva Agreements as "--a declaration made up of the four points formulated by Hanoi, points that are in reality the explanation of the Geneva text. . . ." Fanfani's text showed also that Hanoi was prepared to start negotiations without requiring withdrawal of US forces. This information had reputedly been acquired by two acquaintances of

29. Ibid. There is no evidence in available DOD files to indicate that the SecDef or the JCS were consulted in these early U Thant proposals or that they were even aware of them.

30. "Background Information Relating to SE Asia and Vietnam," S.Com on Foreign Relations, Mar 68, p. 24.

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Fanfani's during an interview in Hanoi. In a vein reminiscent of President Johnson's offer, Ho Chi Minh had reportedly told these men, "I am prepared to go anywhere; to meet anyone."³¹

Without fully accepting the facts as reported, the United States Government took every possible step to insure that, if the Fanfani text was authentic, a suitable contact would be established. Secretary Rusk sent back to the Italian Foreign Minister on 4 December comments on the reputed proposals, establishing the US position on each of them. He stated that the United States would be willing to negotiate on the basis of the Geneva Agreements of 1954 without any qualifications or conditions. On the other hand, the United States did not consider the Hanoi four points an acceptable interpretation of the Geneva Agreements of 1954, particularly since the four points called for acquiescence in the political program of the NLF. "Nevertheless," said Mr. Rusk, "we are prepared to include these four points for consideration in any peace talks along with any proposals which the United States, South Vietnam and other governments may wish to advance."

Mr. Rusk noted that, while the United States would be prepared to negotiate without a ceasefire, should NVN want one as a prior condition it would have to be equitable and reciprocal. In other words, the infiltration of men and supplies from Hanoi and the VC terrorism would have to stop at the same time the bombing of NVN and US/GVN operations in the south were stopped. Rusk told Fanfani that he was far from convinced that Ho Chi Minh and Pham Van Dong were, as quoted by the Italian sources, really willing to start negotiations. He offered to have US representatives meet with the Italian sources if desired and offered Fanfani "free use" of his statement of the US position. On 13 December Fanfani told Rusk that a summary of the Secretary's "essential observations" on Hanoi's reputed position had been turned over for delivery to Hanoi by a qualified representative and that he was sure it had already reached its destination.³²

³¹. Ltr, Fanfani to Pres Johnson, 20 Nov 65, Dept of State Bulletin, LIV (3 Jan 66), p. 11.

³². Ltr, Rusk to Fanfani, 4 Dec 65; Ltr, Fanfani to Rusk, 13 Dec 65; Dept of State Bulletin, LIV (3 Jan 66) pp. 11-13.

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The Italian peace initiative, bona fide or not, came to an unsuccessful conclusion. A misleading leak to a newspaper, indicating that the United States was once again ignoring a valid peace feeler, caused the Secretary of State to release the story of the Fanfani correspondence. "In view of Stevenson-Sevareid episode," he told Ambassador Lodge, "we concluded we must release entire correspondence to make our full position clear and to maintain our peace-seeking posture."³³

Angered by the State Department release, Hanoi denied that it had been in contact with the Italians on possible negotiations, calling the story "sheer groundless fabrications." The Italian sources continued to insist that they had reported Ho Chi Minh's statements accurately.³⁴

The Holiday Truce Period

From the beginning of the insurgency, the opposing forces in Vietnam had curtailed their military actions during Tet, the lunar New Year. On 7 December the clandestine Liberation Radio, voice of the VC, broadcast an offer to observe a 12-hour truce beginning on Christmas Eve. Initially the Secretary of State characterized this offer as being of no political consequence and a matter for local authorities in RVN to decide. Soon, however, it ballooned into great political importance and resulted in a substantial reduction in military pressures on the enemy for a considerable period, with adverse effects on the US/GVN military position in the field and with little tangible benefit politically.³⁵

On 13 December the Department of State informed the US Ambassador to RVN that the VC's proposal was attracting considerable attention and that "wider cease-fire" proposals might be forthcoming shortly. The US Mission Council

33. (S) Msg, State 1705 to Saigon, 18 Dec 65, JCS IN 12791

34. "Background Information Relating to SE Asia and Vietnam," S. Com on Foreign Relations, Mar 68, p. 24; Keesing's, p. 21353.

35. This entire section is based on the study (S-GP 1) JCS Hist Div, "Chronology of Events Concerning the Christmas Truce and Tet Stand-Down, 1965-66," 4 Jan 66.

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had already approved a policy for the Tet season, 21-23 January, in which air operations over NVN and Laos would be greatly reduced and military operations in RVN would, apart from necessary defensive measures, virtually cease.

It is clear that US officials believed the VC had scored a psychological victory in being the first to propose a holiday ceasefire. Ambassador Lodge recommended on 17 December that a statement, in broad terms, on the reduced US/GVN military posture during Tet be made in order "to pre-empt VC initiative in announcing Tet season ceasefire." With regard to Christmas, the US Mission Council recommended that the United States not respond publicly to the VC offer and that bombing operations over Laos and NVN be continued. However, military operations by US/GVN forces in RVN should virtually cease, except for air operations against VC base areas. Ambassador Lodge noted that this course would not in any way mitigate the propaganda gains made by the VC and suggested that the United States make effective proposals "for a real cease-fire which would win for us considerable propaganda gains."

In the meantime, the Joint Chiefs of Staff learned that the Department of State was preparing proposals for US initiatives on the Christmas and Tet holiday truces that went far beyond anything the VC had proposed. Apparently because of a sense of urgency, a message dealing with Christmas truce arrangements was coordinated by the Department of State and Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) so hurriedly that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not have ample time to consider it formally before its dispatch on 19 December. The message proposed to the Ambassador certain definite actions to be taken with regard to the Christmas truce.

State Department officials believed, in line with the Ambassador's reasoning, that a GVN Tet initiative should be the real response to the VC Christmas offer. However, they were concerned that "some quarters," even perhaps a responsible government, might appeal for "a more forthcoming response" to the VC offer and that the United States should be prepared for this. They suggested that perhaps a joint GVN/US announcement be made that their forces would "respond appropriately" to VC actions on 24 and 25 December. Further it was suggested that the United States and GVN consider some "acceptable and attractive" proposal for the Tet period which would be announced before Christmas. The US public relations posture would be much improved, with little

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military disadvantage, if bombing of NVN were suspended for a 24-hour period beginning on Christmas Eve without prior public announcement. They believed that air operations in RVN should be drastically reduced and other operations there on Christmas be halted except for those absolutely necessary to security of forces.

Ambassador Lodge opposed a public announcement accepting the VC offer, which he called a farce. However, he agreed with the State Department position on suspension of bombing in NVN and other actions in the south. He opposed the suggestion that the US/GVN make a truce offer concerning Tet prior to Christmas, saying it would be better to make such an announcement in early January.

Meanwhile other factors had developed, not the least of which was a strong public appeal by Pope Paul, on 19 December, in which he commended the VC truce proposal "for the blessed Christmas Day" to the "wisdom and heart of the responsible leaders."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, in view of the State Department suggestions to the Ambassador, immediately asked CINCPAC to assess their effects on operations. He replied that suspension of bombing of NVN and of ground and air offensive operations in RVN for Christmas would not result in any significant military disadvantage. On the same day this reply was received, 20 December, Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance called for the JCS views on the Christmas truce for use by the President in a news conference slated in less than an hour. Meeting hurriedly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to recommend to the President that no statement be made to the press on the subject, but that if one must be made it should be along the lines of Ambassador Lodge's recommendation. There should be no overt response and air operations in NVN and Laos should continue, but with some relaxation of offensive operations in the RVN. The Acting Chairman, General McConnell, immediately relayed this position to Mr. Vance. The White House endorsed Pope Paul's call for peace in Vietnam but did not comment directly on his call for a Christmas truce.

On the afternoon of 20 December, the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA), Mr. McNaughton, called the Assistant to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lt. General Andrew Goodpaster, and informed him that a joint State-Defense message was being sent to the Ambassador instructing him

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to persuade GVN to issue an announcement on the Christmas period, including a statement that "no military action will be initiated except in self-defense in either North or South Vietnam from 1800 on December 24 to midnight on Christmas Day Saigon time." There would be no announcement of Tet policy until after Christmas. The Secretary of Defense had instructed Mr. McNaughton to inform the Joint Chiefs of Staff of this message because he realized that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were opposed to the "self-defense language." Mr. McNaughton stated that the message was going out despite this opposition. The message was dispatched on the late afternoon of 20 December, Washington time.

On 21 December the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the United States adhere to the US Mission Council position on the Christmas truce, as set forth on 17 December, because the Council was "in the best position to determine the risks and benefits of a Christmas stand-down. . . ." On the next day, Ambassador Lodge notified the Department of State that GVN had accepted "in principle" the Christmas truce policy proposed by the State Department on 20 December. It had also accepted the program for Tet that Ambassador Lodge had outlined on 17 December, saying that its forces would carry out no major military operations in this period.

Shortly thereafter, General Westmoreland informed CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that during the period from 1800, 24 December to 2400, 25 December his forces would: 1) assume a posture of extreme alertness, continue normal security precautions, and be prepared with ready reaction forces, to respond promptly to any VC initiative; 2) units in contact with VC forces would not break contact; 3) no ground offensive operations would be conducted but all forces would be prepared to react promptly and be prepared to destroy VC or NVA forces if they started operations which presented such an opportunity; 4) air operations would be conducted only in support of US/RVNAF forces in contact, but 2d Air Division forces would maintain ground and air alert aircraft as requested and required, and unexpended ordnance would be jettisoned in unpopulated areas of previously specified strike areas; 5) operations involving route security would not be discontinued and air or ground alert aircraft would be provided as operations required. The RVNAF Joint General Staff was issuing orders to its forces to follow these same ground rules.

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On 22 December, the State Department instructed Ambassador Lodge to have COMUSMACV announce as early as possible that US forces had been instructed to cease fire except in self-defense from 1800, 24 December to 2400, 25 December. On the same day the Secretary of Defense instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to put the provisions of the Christmas truce as outlined by the Department of State on 19 December and in the State-Defense message of 20 December into effect. The Joint Chiefs of Staff immediately directed CINCPAC and CINCSAC to stop "any air operations over the DRV," as well as BARREL ROLL, STEEL TIGER, and ARC LIGHT missions during the specified truce. Air and ground operations in RVN would be carried out in accordance with the operational policy set forth by COMUSMACV. GVN took similar action with its own forces. BLUE SPRINGS operations were allowed over NVN during the period so long as manned support aircraft were not used.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had been opposed in some respects to a Christmas stand-down in response to what was essentially an enemy initiative. But, in view of the short period of stand-down and the caveats and safeguards written into the policy, they were not greatly concerned over the military consequences.

Subsequent actions by higher authority did, however, give them concern and cause them to protest on what they considered to be sound military grounds. On the evening of 24 December, Washington time, while the Christmas truce was in effect in Vietnam, the Deputy Secretary of Defense sought JCS agreement to a proposed State-Defense message which would, contrary to the JCS recommendations, extend the ceasefire period. The purpose behind such an extension would be to turn international public opinion in favor of the United States by placing the onus for the renewal of fighting on the enemy. The United States did not want the end of the Christmas ceasefire "signalled before the world by US acts of violence." The Acting Chairman protested such an extension on military grounds, but the President decided the truce would be extended. He did, however, direct the inclusion of a discretionary provision in the message to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, which later was used to advantage. The final paragraph of the message, added at the President's direction, stated:

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"We recognize the heavy responsibility these instructions place on all concerned and we want you to know that you are free to make your own decisions within the spirit of these instructions and that those decisions will have our full support."

Orders were issued on 25 December to continue the restrictions on operations in North Vietnam and on ARC LIGHT. Full air operations over Laos could be resumed but not from RVN bases. CINCPAC was instructed that, until he could make public confirmed evidence of renewed VC violence, restrictions would remain in effect. State and Defense officials did not feel it would be very long, "a day or so," until the VC resumed the fighting.

As to operations in RVN, General Westmoreland was informed that, "consistent with the safety of his forces," he could conduct normal patrolling operations required for self-defense but would conduct all other operations in RVN so that responsibility for renewing hostilities fell on the VC. He was to coordinate with the Embassy in ensuring that GVN followed the same course as the United States in this matter. GVN was to be assured that this extension did not modify or dilute the "total US commitment" to RVN, and that it was being done only to secure the overwhelming support of the American people and the broad understanding of the international public. There would be no public discussion of the extension because the United States expected it to be short-lived and wished it kept secret. The GVN agreed to conform.

On 26 December, COMUSMACV reported that, between 1800 24 December and 0300 26 December, Saigon time, there had been 71 significant VC-initiated incidents, a level at least double the pre-ceasefire rate. He called for immediate lifting of all restrictions on his operations in RVN. CINCPAC concurred and, further, asked that ROLLING THUNDER be resumed immediately.

With little hesitation, the Acting Chairman contacted Admiral Sharp, and, basing his action on the discretionary provision within the truce-extension directive, told CINCPAC that so far as he was concerned the VC had broken the truce and that all restrictions on operations in RVN could now be lifted if CINCPAC judged it necessary. The Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, interpreted the discretionary provision as giving CINCPAC the authority to

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decide whether or not to resume operations in RVN, but not as concerned NVN. Consequently ROLLING THUNDER was not affected. Admiral Sharp immediately instructed General Westmoreland to resume offensive air operations and unrestricted ground operations in RVN. He specifically excluded ARC LIGHT operations, however. The Deputy Secretary of Defense, contacted by General McConnell immediately after CINCPAC's message went out to COMUSMACV, agreed that the action had been proper. On 27 December authority was granted to resume ARC LIGHT and some reconnaissance programs over NVN. Despite strong recommendations by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, however, no authority to resume ROLLING THUNDER was granted. COMUSMACV and CINCPAC added their voices to the call for resumption of air operations, but the ban on ROLLING THUNDER continued into the new year.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out to the Secretary of Defense, that from the military standpoint there had not only been no advantages realized in the Christmas ceasefire but there had been distinct disadvantages. During the 36-hour truce the VC had launched 85 significant incidents in which 73 friendly military had been killed and 101 wounded. The enemy had been permitted unhindered movement, and had taken full advantage of it. Friendly patrols had been made more vulnerable by cessation of artillery and air support. A psychological letdown and reduction in alertness had occurred. Because reconnaissance of NVN had not been permitted, airfields at Vinh and Dong Hoi had gone unobserved for 43 hours. This, in view of the enemy's IL-28 force, had endangered US forces at Da Nang and Chu Lai. Also, suspension of ROLLING THUNDER was permitting unrestrained logistic buildup by the enemy, continued infiltration of men, repair of his rail and road routes, more effective deployment of his air defense forces, and an opportunity generally to recoup.

Preparations for Tet

Ambassador Lodge had been successful in forestalling any announcement of US intentions on the Tet period until after Christmas. Nevertheless the matter remained under active consideration by higher authorities. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had been asked on 22 December to concur in a draft message from the State Department to Ambassador Lodge concurring with "the GVN and Mission in view that GVN and Free World forces should repeat Christmas actions, i.e., initiation of no military activity in North or South

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Vietnam during three day Tet period." They did not address this issue until 27 December, however, owing to other more pressing matters. On that date the JCS informed the Secretary of Defense that they, as well as COMUSMACV and CINCPAC, were opposed to any relaxation of military effort during the Tet holiday period. Their experience with the Christmas truce had more than convinced them that such actions were not in the best interests of either the United States or GVN. Knowing, however, that GVN intended to modify its operations to some degree during Tet, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in accordance with similar views from the field commanders, advised the Secretary of Defense that if the United States was going to follow the GVN lead, the minimum posture for Tet was that which had been spelled out by Ambassador Lodge in the US Mission Council recommendations on 14 December.

These recommendations provided that air operations over NVN would continue but with emphasis on special measures to keep down civilian casualties. Air operations in Laos would continue. In the south, forces in contact with the VC would not break contact but no ground offensive operations would be planned. Forces would be ready to react promptly and take other measures for their own security. No ground operations would be conducted, if possible, around hamlets or villages. VC base areas would be subject to air attack but strikes in hamlets and villages would be avoided. Other intelligence and psychological warfare measures would be intensified.

General Wheeler, who was in Thailand at the time, sent a message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff registering his strong opposition to a stand-down of all military operations during the Tet holiday. But, in the event the Joint Chiefs of Staff were overruled, he called for a "bare survival level" of security operations, including increased ground observation and security patrols and extensive air reconnaissance to detect possible threats to US forces. He called also, in this case, for increased reconnaissance over NVN.

The VC again anticipated the United States and GVN when, on 28 December, they called by Liberation Radio for a four-day ceasefire during Tet. They promised, during the period from 2400 on 19 January to 2400 on 23 January, to fire only in self-defense and to allow visits and attendance at celebrations by soldiers of GVN so long as

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no weapons were carried. No mention was made of privileges to be granted US and FWMAF soldiers.

On 31 December Ambassador Lodge informed the Department of State that he proposed to announce that Free World forces would not launch offensive operations during Tet although they would maintain the right of self-defense and would continue to patrol. He understood that GVN was going ahead with its earlier plans on Tet and asked for authorization to coordinate US plans with those of GVN. The State Department concurred but instructed the Ambassador to say nothing publicly at this time concerning military operations against NVN. Commenting on the proposed policy outlined by Ambassador Lodge, CINCPAC on the same day noted that it seemed to delete offensive air operations in RVN, but he considered this "satisfactory" so long as the VC did not initiate offensive action. He recommended that the stand-down over NVN not continue until Tet, although the United States could "live with a stand-down during Tet," provided reconnaissance operations continued.

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Chapter 29

LESS WAR BUT NO PEACE: THE SITUATION IN JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1966

Beginning in late December 1965, the relaxation of military pressures by the United States in favor of political efforts continued into the new year and afforded the enemy an unusual opportunity. US military leaders believed, although their first evidence was scanty, that Hanoi was using the period of respite, not to explore the sincerity and significance of the US peace initiative, but to enhance its own military position by repairing bomb damage and by sending troops and supplies southward into RVN at an increased rate. US military authorities sought to assess the impact of the enemy's actions and fretted at the restrictions placed upon their own operations.¹

At the expiration of the Christmas truce the United States had resumed military operations in RVN and Laos but continued its self-imposed pause in bombing NVN. The principal US means for keeping pressure on the North, ROLLING THUNDER, continued in suspension during January as the result of a Presidential decision to explore exhaustively the possibilities of peaceful settlement. In this period the President directed a series of coordinated political actions designed to bring the enemy to the conference table or, at the least, to determine his attitude toward negotiation. Some hope existed that the Soviet Union, or even Communist China, might be persuaded by US forbearance to counsel Hanoi in favor of negotiation.

The Peace Offensive

Despite its modest beginnings, the war in Vietnam had become costly to the United States. During 1965 the cost of the war had risen sharply in dollars and in casualties. By the end of the year it was clear that the continuing and accelerated fighting, especially the bombing in NVN, was also

1. Unless otherwise indicated, material in this section is derived from: JCS Hist Div. (TS) "Chronology of Events Concerning the Christmas Truce and Tet Stand-Down, 1965-1966," Supplement I, 3 Mar 66.

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costing the United States dearly in prestige and good will among neutral nations and even among its allies. Signs that segments of US domestic opinion were hardening against the national policy in Vietnam--demonstrations by activist groups and public statements against the war by prominent Americans--continued to grow. Moreover, closely limited US objectives in Vietnam did not include the destruction of NVN or the overthrow of its government. All of these factors seem to have weighed heavily in the President's decision to take advantage of the natural breaking point in hostilities at Christmas, and Tet to initiate an active, and unique, quest for a peaceful solution to the war in Vietnam.

On 28 December President Johnson sent emissaries to key world capitals to present the US case and to spell out the details of the US position and desire for peaceful settlement. Vice President Humphrey visited Far Eastern capitals; Ambassador Harriman went to Warsaw, Belgrade, the Middle East, and Asia; McGeorge Bundy was sent to Ottawa, while Ambassador Goldberg visited the Vatican, Paris, and London. African capitals were covered by Assistant Secretary of State Williams; Ambassador Mann talked to Latin American leaders. At the same time the State Department provided US diplomatic officials throughout the world with a clear statement of the US position on Vietnam, instructing them to use it "in an effective manner." The nations concerned were informed that the United States held to the premise that "external aggressions" had caused and were sustaining the war in Vietnam. US troops sent to Vietnam to repel the aggressors would stay until aggression had ended. The United States had more at stake than Vietnam or Southeast Asia--it had to consider the integrity of its commitment and the importance of that commitment to the peace of the whole world. Reiterating the US desire for peace, the position statement presented fourteen points as a basis for peace negotiations in Vietnam.

These fourteen points, publicly announced on 28 December, were: 1) the United States accepted the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Agreements as an adequate basis for peace; 2) the United States would welcome a conference on Southeast Asia or on any part of Southeast Asia; 3) the United States would welcome "negotiations without pre-conditions" as proposed by the 17 nonaligned nations; 4) the United States would welcome unconditional discussions as proposed by President Johnson; 5) a ceasefire could be the first order of business at a conference or could be the subject of preliminary discussions; 6) Hanoi's four points (announced in April 1965) could be discussed along with points that others might wish to propose;

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7) the United States wanted no bases in Southeast Asia; 8) the United States did not want a continuing military presence in South Vietnam after peace was assured; 9) the United States supported free elections in South Vietnam; 10) the reunification of Vietnam should be determined by the free decision of the Vietnamese people; 11) the nations of Southeast Asia could be "non-aligned or neutral" if that was their choice; 12) the United States was prepared to contribute \$1 billion to a regional development program for Vietnam, including North Vietnam; 13) the Viet Cong would have no difficulty in having their views represented at a conference after hostilities had ceased; 14) the United States "could stop the bombing of North Vietnam as a step toward peace although there has not been the slightest hint or suggestion from the other side as to what they would do if the bombing stopped."²

Subsequently, in mid-January, Secretary of State Rusk and the Vice President, while in Delhi for the funeral of Mr. Shastri, talked with Soviet Premier Kosygin. Mr. Rusk also visited Saigon and Manila.

While the majority of nations consulted, even some communist nations, including Yugoslavia, reacted favorably to the US peace offensive, the key countries of the communist bloc apparently dismissed it as a propaganda effort. The Soviet Union refused to take any positive action to bring about negotiations, while Communist China, which had not been consulted by US representatives, blasted US actions as a hoax and as a prelude to the expansion of the war.

Although US representatives made direct contact with NVN through diplomatic channels, the contact was fruitless. Hanoi termed the US effort "deceitful" and labelled the suspension of bombing a "trick." North Vietnam restated its four points as a basis for beginning negotiations, and refused to moderate its stand in any respect. Nevertheless the United States persisted in its course through the period of Tet.

Disagreement on US Policy

In 1966 United States policy toward Vietnam was influenced by the strong and differing opinions among the world

2. (~~6~~-GP 3) Msg, State Circ 1243 to All Posts, 30 Dec 65, JCS IN 30438.

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community of nations and by dissension among the American people. The nature of the war and of US involvement gave rise to strong feelings and to expressions of those feelings within and outside the United States, among political and religious leaders and among the people. The vivid, detailed reporting of all aspects of the struggle by the world press, the on-the-spot coverage by TV, radio, and newsreel movies served to stimulate, catalyze, and deepen the disagreement. The communist bloc took full advantage of the opportunities thus offered to weaken the unity of the American people on prosecution of the war, to exploit the divisive effects on US allies, and to foster a deeper alienation between the United States and the uncommitted "neutral" nations.

The attitudes of other nations of the Free World toward US policy in Vietnam contrasted markedly with those that had been demonstrated during the Korean war. Some nations--Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, and the Philippines--stood openly with the United States and contributed forces to Vietnam. Other US allies who had supported the US-inspired fight against communist aggression in Korea fifteen years earlier could not now bring themselves to support the United States in Vietnam. Great Britain and Canada virtually dissociated themselves from US actions in Vietnam, while another Korean war ally, France, loudly criticized US policies and engaged in obstructive measures. This lack of unity on Vietnam among US allies was of great concern to the President, but more disheartening, and more serious, was the widespread lack of understanding among the American people of the real nature and purpose of the war.

The bombing of NVN, the fierce campaign of annihilation waged against the VC in RVN, the use of napalm, defoliants, and land mines, had been widely and colorfully described in the world press, and had aroused sympathy for the enemy among some Americans as well as in foreign populations. Nurtured by the communist bloc, an image of a United States bullying a tiny nation had gradually been projected. And each further step which the President took to achieve US objectives in Vietnam added cogency to that image. The terror tactics of the VC, their kidnapping, torture, and assassination of GVN officials and civilians, and their oppression of captive populations in the areas under their control, were discounted as US propaganda. Such manifestations were not unexpected in communist and "neutral" countries and to a degree even among some allies. Their appearance, however, among vociferous groups in the United States posed special problems for the Administration.

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The problems began to arise in the fall of 1965 as deployment of US forces picked up momentum and the tide of combat began its slow turn against the enemy. In October a group known as the National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam demonstrated near many military installations in the United States. In the same month a New York youth burned his draft card publicly, setting off a rash of similar incidents to protest US policy in Vietnam. In November two men set fire to themselves, one in front of the Pentagon, the other before UN headquarters. Other organized groups staged protest marches on the White House. The FBI reported communist influence in some of these groups.³

Early 1966 was marked by an increase in protests by citizens groups of various political or religious affiliation. Antiwar demonstrations were staged in such widely separated cities as New York and Atlanta, and student protest, including more burning of draft cards and refusals to register for the draft, increased. The protest groups could not be lightly dismissed by the President since they often included well-known citizens of good repute and in prominent positions. Sixteen Harvard University professors and 13 scientists, for example, released a public statement in January attacking the US use of defoliants in RVN. The Synagogue Council of America urged the President to refrain from escalating the war and called for negotiations, including NLF representation, through the United Nations. The National Emergency Committee of Clergy Concerned about Vietnam, formed in January, had among its chief members Richard Cardinal Cushing, Archbishop of Boston, and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Their aim was to make the President aware of "a growing consensus across the country against the war and in support of his peace offensive." Other groups were less impressive, but no less active. The International Committee of Conscience on

3. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4040 to CSA et al., 13 Oct 65; "Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam," S. Com on Foreign Relations, Mar 68, 90th Cong, 2nd Sess (1968), p. 302. (Hereafter cited as "Background Information Relating to SE Asia and Vietnam," S. Com on Foreign Relations, Mar 68). (S-GP 1) Memo, Justice Dept, FBI, "Demonstrations Protesting United States Intervention in Vietnam," 17 Dec 65, CCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 65.

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Vietnam, also formed in January, was composed of Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant clergy and had been established under auspices of a pacifist organization. This group informed the President that "the horrors that your planes and massive fire power are inflicting on the people of Vietnam are beyond any moral or political justification." In Berkeley, California, the Medical Aid Committee for Vietnam claimed to have collected 1,000 dollars from students at the University of California to buy medical supplies for the VC.⁴

Nor did the Administration want for critics among respected political leaders and other prominent Americans. Mainly these critics were motivated by concern that the United States was involved, in the catch phrase of the Korean war period, "the wrong war in the wrong place at the wrong time." They did not share the President's view of the strategic importance of Southeast Asia, the moral significance of pledges by past Presidents to preserve the freedom of RVN or the political wisdom of halting the aggression by force. Apparently, however, they were moved to public opposition by the very real fear that US policy toward Vietnam would cause a full-scale war with Communist China, or even more serious, a war with the Soviet Union. A US Senate group headed by Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, long a critic of US Vietnam policy, reported to the President in December that there was no immediate rapid solution to the war and that the "very slim" prospect of a negotiated settlement had, as an alternative, the prospect of continued fighting which might lead to a general war on the Asian mainland.⁵

Commenting on the military progress of the war the Senate group observed that: 1) the introduction of US forces had blunted but not turned back the VC; 2) despite the US force increases, the overall control of the RVN had not changed much from the beginning of 1965; 3) so long as NVN and its supporters were willing and able to meet increased force by increased force, the US was applying pressure against an "open ended" military situation; and 4) Laos was deeply "though unwillingly" involved in the hostilities. The group pointed out that the war was beginning to lap over into Cambodia, and that Thailand and all of Southeast Asia might

4. Facts on File, 1966, pp. 1-72.

5. Congressional Quarterly, 14 Jan 66, pp. 52-55.

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become a battlefield. The group warned of the danger of Communist China becoming more deeply involved and of NVN becoming more and more dependent upon Chinese support and responsive to Chinese control.⁶

The legality of US involvement in RVN was challenged by members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in late January when they subjected Secretary of State Rusk to almost four hours of questioning on Vietnam. Committee Chairman, Senator J.W. Fulbright, claimed that the United States had no legal basis to be in Vietnam, either under the terms of the Senate Resolution of 10 August 1964 or of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty. Secretary of State Rusk stated to the Committee "It is a cause of great concern that the actions of a government over a period of years should surprise anyone when things get difficult. I reject any attempt to cast the United States in the role of gendarme of the universe or to attempt to impose a pax Americana on the whole world."⁷

Senator Fulbright was a particularly constant foe of Administration policy in Vietnam. He stated that Asian nations considered the war a civil war and not communist aggression. He did not believe that the war warranted escalation or that it involved the vital security of the United States even though it could trigger a world war. He charged publicly that unless the United States was prepared to fight a general war in Asia, it had no alternative but to "seek a general accommodation" with China for the "neutralization" of Southeast Asia. His version of "neutralization" included powerful US bases on the coast of Vietnam. "History . . .", Senator Fulbright said, "suggests that the military solution that seems so promising today is likely to result in disaster tomorrow, whereas the course of accommodation, which always seems so difficult, is the only course with demonstrated promise of being able to bring about a lasting and honorable peace."⁸

Another perennial dissenter from US policy toward Vietnam was Senator Wayne Morse. He called US policy misguided and alleged the President was losing support. He said that the American people would soon repudiate the war. On 29 January he proposed a resolution to direct the Senate Foreign Relations

6. Ibid.

7. Facts on File, 1966, p. 26.

8. Ibid., pp. 62, 75-76.

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Committee to conduct a full "and complete investigation of all aspects of United States policies in Vietnam." In a second resolution he proposed rescinding the 10 August 1964 Joint Congressional Resolution giving the President power to "take all necessary measures" to repel aggression in South-east Asia. His first resolution was passed, the second defeated. Senator Robert F. Kennedy said in January that if the United States regarded bombing as the answer to the Vietnam war "we are heading straight for disaster." He called for a coalition government in RVN with NLF participation in that government as part of a negotiated settlement.⁹

Public hearings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee continued through the first half of February, attended with great publicity. Secretary McNamara and General Wheeler refused to testify at these open hearings on the grounds that their open testimony would be against the public interest. Several Senators objected but President Johnson solved the problem by announcing a conference on Southeast Asia to be held in Honolulu concurrently with the Senate hearings. During the Senate hearings the Administration's policies on Vietnam were brought under sharp attack by such respected and prominent Americans as Lieutenant General James M. Gavin and former Ambassadors George F. Kennan and John K. Galbraith. In testimony before the Committee these men expressed opposition to the US involvement, denigrated the strategic value of Vietnam to the United States, denied that the United States was making useful progress in the war, and expressed fear that continued US support would bring escalation. All seemed to agree that the United States could not with honor disengage, but all wanted the United States to tone down its military efforts and to "bargain" for some sort of compromise settlement with the communists. This dissent was destined to swell in the months that followed and to have a profound effect on the national policy.¹⁰

9. Facts on File, 1966, p. 62.

10. Hearings, Supplemental Foreign Assistance, Fiscal Year 1966--Vietnam (on S. 2793), Pt 1, pp. 226-327, 331-430; Hearings, Foreign Assistance, 1966 (on S. 2859 and S. 2861), S. Com. on Foreign Relations, 89th Cong, 2nd Sess (1966), pp. 229-272.

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The Military Picture-January 1966

Meanwhile, in Vietnam the war continued. United States military leaders had generally opposed the December cessation of fighting in RVN and the extension into January of the recess on bombing of NVN. Their opposition had been inspired by concern that these suspensions would cut into the military advantage that the United States had gained slowly and at great cost in the last months of 1965. They were particularly concerned that, by exploiting the bombing pause, the enemy would greatly increase his strength in RVN, thus shifting the balance of military strength existing in the South. The combination of forces on the friendly side, RVNAF, US, and FWMAF, exceeded 750,000 men at the beginning of 1966, more than three times the number of communist soldiers in RVN. The RVNAF totalled 571,213, US forces 184,314 and FWMAF forces 22,404. Friendly forces had a combat strength of 193 maneuver battalions along with sizeable artillery forces.¹¹

Under his overall command General Westmoreland had established a Corps-like subordinate command, Field Force, Vietnam, with headquarters at Nha Trang. A second such command, II Field Force, Vietnam, was to be activated at Bien Hoa on 15 March. In January, the major US Army maneuver units available to COMUSMACV were the 1st Infantry Division, 1st Cavalry Division (AM), 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division and 173d Airborne Brigade. He had 13-1/3 US Marine Corps battalions in the III MAF. FWMAF forces maneuver battalions comprised 9 ROK and 1 Australian. There were also 22-1/3 US Engineer battalions, 24 field artillery battalions, four air defense artillery battalions and 46 helicopter companies/squadrons available to COMUSMACV. Army forces were deployed widely throughout RVN with major concentrations of troops at An Khe, Bien Hoa, Cam Ranh, Nha Trang, Qui Nhon and Tan Son Nhut. US Marine units, under CG, III MAF, were stationed principally around Da Nang and Chu Lai. United States Air Force units in RVN were concentrated at Bien Hoa, Cam Ranh Bay, Da Nang and Tan Son Nhut. US naval personnel in RVN were mainly located at Chu Lai and Da Nang.¹²

11. ~~(TS NOFORN-GP 1)~~ COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 3. The figure of 184,314 differs from strengths reported by COMUSMACV as of 30 Dec 65 as listed in ~~(TS NOFORN-GP 1)~~ Supplement to NMCC OPSUM 1-66, 3 Jan 66, which shows the following aggregate strengths for US forces in RVN: US Army, 109,611; USMC, 37,916; US Navy, 9,470; USAF, 21,520; Total, 178,821.

12. ~~(TS NOFORN-GP 1)~~ Supplement to NMCC OPSUM 1-66, 3 Jan 66.

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The Enemy Side

Opposing friendly forces was an indeterminate but substantial number of VC/NVA troops. Estimates of enemy strengths and locations had traditionally been inexact and conflicting in the Vietnam war, testifying to the elusive qualities of the enemy, the difficulties posed by terrain and population factors, fluctuating infiltration, and the constant shifting of the battle. At the beginning of 1966, however, COMUSMACV estimated that the enemy strength confronting US/GVN and FWMAF forces in RVN totalled about 230,000 men, including VC main force units, VC irregulars, and NVA troops. The enemy order of battle developed by COMUSMACV showed 8 confirmed and 2 possible NVA regiments and 13 confirmed VC regiments in RVN, with a possible overall total of as many as 129 battalions.¹³

The enemy's regular forces were well trained, skilfully led, and well armed. By 1966 the VC/NVA individual infantry weapons were among the world's best. An enemy unit armed with the new family of 7.62mm weapons and the K-50 submachine gun far surpassed in firepower an opposing friendly unit equipped with such semi-automatic weapons as the US M-1 rifle or the M-14 rifle. This new family consisted of a Soviet-designed assault rifle, carbine, and a light machine gun, all firing the same 7.62 cartridge. These were appearing in increasing numbers in RVN. Also in 1965 RVNAF and paramilitary units had lost 16,915 weapons to the enemy. And some weapons, particularly mines and grenades, were manufactured locally with explosives shipped in through Laos and Cambodia or by sea.

13. (~~TS NOFORN~~) DIA Bulletin 28-66, 10 Feb 66. Other estimates of this period credit the VC main force units with 59,500 men, the VC irregular force with 100-120,000 men, and the NVA in RVN with 15,000 men, for a total of 174-194,500 exclusive of the "political cadre" and "support troops." (S-NOFORN) DIA Bulletins 21-66 and 37-66, 1 Feb and 24 Feb 66. Comparable figures are given in (U) "The Vietnam Conflict: The Substance and the Shadow," Report by S. Com on Foreign Relations, 6 Jan 66, 89th Cong, 2nd Sess (1966): "Total VC/NVA, 230,000--including 14,000 NVA, 17,000 support troops, 40,000 political cadre, the remainder VC main force and irregular."

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The Enemy Reaction

The VC/NVA reaction to increased aggressiveness by US/GVN/FWMA forces had been predictable. Having sustained considerable losses, the enemy continued to avoid action in early 1966 as he had in the last months of 1965. But he continued terrorism, sabotage, propaganda, and small hit-and-run attacks to intimidate the population and avoid losing ground to the GVN. Hanoi proclaimed confidence in ultimate victory in RVN, however, boasting that no matter how large the US buildup or how much modern equipment and weapons were sent into RVN, the VC would defeat the GVN. Backed by Communist China and the Soviet Union, NVN gave no indication of slackening its support of the insurgency; rather it gave the strong impression that it would use all its resources, plus those furnished by other communist powers, to keep the VC in the fight.

Continuing the pattern established in 1965, NVN sent more and more of its own regular forces into RVN as units rather than as cadre to bolster the VC. In spite of the increasing buildup rate of US forces in RVN during 1965, and in spite of the heavy casualties inflicted upon the enemy, the ratio of VC/NVA to friendly forces in RVN had remained about the same. Enemy forces were able to maintain a supply level adequate to their needs. This was attributable to the steady infiltration into RVN. COMUSMACV, basing his estimates on interrogation of prisoners and defectors, as well as on study of captured documents, reported that 13,953 VC and NVA infiltrators had been confirmed as entering RVN during 1965, with a possible 5,165 additional having entered. The majority of these infiltrators had been NVA regulars.¹⁵

The VC had sufficient manpower resources from which to draw for its own units. COMUSMACV reported in early 1966 that the VC controlled nearly a quarter of the population of the RVN. Able-bodied males under VC control were vulnerable to coercion and induction into the VC when needed.¹⁶

15. (~~S NOFORN~~) DIA IB, 11-66, 17 Jan 66.

16. (~~S NOFORN~~) DIA IB, 30-66, 14 Feb 66.

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The GVN and Its Problems - January 1966

The military dangers to the RVN continued to be heightened by its political problems. By the beginning of 1966 these problems were not so immediate as at some periods in its past, but they demanded close attention. A degree of stability prevailed, owing mainly to the National Leadership Committee, the military directorate which had been in power since mid-1965. Of its leaders, however, only General Nguyen Thi, CG of the I Corps, enjoyed significant civilian support. Although the GVN was hampered by religious differences, personalities, private interests, and other divisive factors at the turn of the year, consideration was given to some form of elections to form a representative government.

On 15 January, however, Premier Ky noted in a report to the nation that his government was unable to create a "favorable political climate" for such elections.

According to COMUSMACV, the disruptive influence of the two most powerful groups in RVN, the Buddhists and the Catholics, was not being exerted openly but neither were the two groups doing anything constructive to bring about increased political stability. The endemic problems--the allegiance of the Montagnards, graft and corruption in the government, and the refusal of local officials to follow direction from the national authorities--had not improved.¹⁷

Inflation represented one of the more serious problems facing the GVN. The amount of money in circulation in RVN had increased by 75 percent during 1965 and prices had jumped an average of 40 percent. In the six months before January 1966 the cost of living in the city of Hue, a stronghold of the Buddhists, had risen 100 percent. Budget deficits, military spending, and economic dislocation, not to mention the impact of spending by US forces, had originated and continued to aggravate this inflation. Despite the best programs US officials could devise to hold down the inflationary trend, the sources of inflation were strong and increasing.

In spite of the many pessimistic aspects of his country's situation, Premier Ky reported to his people that political stability and national solidarity had been achieved in the face of enemy attack and that the military tide had been turned in their favor. He cited progress in land reform, rural electrification, low-cost housing, health, social welfare, the Chieu Hoi program, and other civil improvements.

17. ~~(TS-NOFORN)~~ COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 7-8.

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Under his initiative, funds had been released for a number of programs aimed at improving economic and social conditions in RVN, particularly in rural areas, and the outlook for the rural construction program seemed particularly good.

Within a week after Ky's speech, military operations in the RVN were again interrupted in observance of Tet, the traditional Vietnamese holiday season.

Tet

On 5 January the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that Tet would be observed from 210001 to 232400 January 1966 (Saigon Time). During this period the United States and the GVN would conduct no military offensive operations in RVN with the following exceptions: 1) security patrols would be kept up, with ready reaction forces prepared to respond at once to any "VC/PAVN initiative"; 2) friendly forces would keep contact with the enemy unless he was trying to disengage or the operation was over; 3) no offensive air operations would be mounted in RVN unless necessary for security of friendly forces; COMUSMACV could authorize air or naval operations in support of ground forces if needed, and ARC LIGHT strikes could be requested in normal fashion; 4) intensive aerial reconnaissance would be conducted; 5) any operations conducted would avoid populated areas if possible.¹⁸

The intent of the JCS instructions was 1) to put US/FWMAF and, where feasible, the RVNAF, in a position to meet any enemy attacks during Tet with full capabilities and 2) to lessen the chances of the enemy exploiting the Tet stand-down to his military advantage. The Joint Chiefs of Staff warned CINCPAC that the enemy might concentrate his attacks on the US or FWMAF, avoiding the RVNAF for psychological reasons. In an effort to keep the hands of US commanders as free as possible the Joint Chiefs of Staff included a permissive clause in their instructions. While it was US policy, they said, to fix the blame for any renewal of fighting during Tet on the enemy, "US commanders retain full responsibility for safety of their forces and full authority to act to protect

18. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9897 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 5 Jan 66.

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them, including reinstitution as necessary of all military actions suspended by these instructions."¹⁹

Prime Minister Ky concurred in the US Tet policy and tacitly agreed that GVN forces would follow the same rules.²⁰

CINCPAC directed his field commanders to continue, during Tet, all security precautions and patrol activity, including MARKET TIME, and reconnaissance over NVN and the Tonkin Gulf.²¹

In the second week of January indications that the Tet stand-down might be prolonged, in an effort to place the onus for resumption of fighting on the VC, aroused JCS opposition. General Wheeler learned at a White House meeting on 10 January that a draft message was being considered to inform Ambassador Lodge that the United States meant to return to "regular military operations as soon after expiration of VC-announced Tet cease-fire period . . . as we can consistent with the importance of establishing that VC initiated hostilities." The aim would be to show that the VC had failed to observe their own announced truce period and to present specific evidence that they had stepped up their activities immediately after Tet, requiring the US/GVN to respond. The draft message would ask the Ambassador to inform Washington as soon as possible if the VC appeared to be keeping the truce after the Tet period had terminated. The renewal of hostilities or the announcement of intention to do so would be delayed until Washington gave its approval.²²

On 21 January General Wheeler informed the Secretary of Defense that the Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed any extension of the truce. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed, he said, that continuation could cause the United States to slip into a de facto cease-fire in place. An extended truce would give significant advantage to the enemy and would cause unnecessary

19. Ibid.

20. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 2381 to State, 4 Jan 66, JCS IN 34221.

21. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV et al., 060736Z Jan 66, JCS IN 37830. Recce programs over NVN were BLUE TREE, TROJAN HORSE and BLUE SPRINGS--over Tonkin Gulf were SILVER DAWN, BIG EYE and BIG LOOK. See CINCPAC Command History, 1966.

22. (S) Note to Control Div, "10 Jan Morning Meeting at the White House," 10 Jan 66. (S) Draft Joint State-Defense Msg to Saigon and MACV n.d., OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 66.

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casualties to Free World forces. Experience with the Christmas stand-down had shown that there would be "no demonstrated off-setting gains" from an extension or from the conditions set for resumption of operations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed sending the draft message. If additional guidance had to be given, they insisted that it not modify the instructions which they had sent to CINCPAC on 5 January.²³

On 14 January the RVN Joint General Staff issued a Tet ceasefire directive covering the period 201200 to 231200 (Saigon time), a period 24 hours shorter--starting 12 hours later and ending 12 hours earlier--than the ceasefire period announced by the VC. COMUSMACV, following the lead of the GVN, issued similar instructions to his own forces. Concurrently, he reported to CINCPAC the capture of a document revealing VC plans to renew the fighting immediately after their ceasefire ended. General Westmoreland believed that if an effort were made at the end of the Tet ceasefire to prove that the VC had broken the ceasefire, a new approach to the GVN would be necessary. He recommended against such an effort, but stressed that if it were decided to do so, "at least 72 hours" would be needed to get the word out to all of his troops and to coordinate the necessary measures.²⁴

Admiral Sharp notified the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the GVN Tet announcement, noting that the hours (201200-231200 Saigon time) were at variance with the JCS instructions of 5 January, (210001-232400 Saigon time). He joined COMUSMACV in recommending that military action should be resumed 12 hours before the expiration of the time set by the VC, that there should be no extension of the ceasefire beyond that period already announced, and that if any extension were considered he be notified "well in advance."²⁵

On 19 January, with the approval of the Secretary of Defense and the State Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff changed the stand-down period for Tet to begin at the time announced by the GVN, 201200, but set the ending at 231800

23. (~~TS~~-GP 3) CM-1105-66 to SecDef, 12 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (14 Dec 65) sec 1.

24. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 141236Z Jan 65, JCS IN 51620.

25. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 152032Z Jan 66, JCS IN 54163.

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(Saigon time), six hours later than the termination hour announced by the GVN.²⁶

The Tet stand-down went into effect as scheduled but the enemy did not keep the peace completely. General Westmoreland reported at the conclusion of the period that the VC had initiated 106 incidents of violence of varying degree. Seventy-seven attacks against US/FWMAF and 29 against the RVNAF had resulted in 13 killed, 26 wounded, and one missing. Fifty-seven VC had been killed. Normal operations resumed on schedule in RVN but the stand-down on the bombing of NVN continued.²⁷

26. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1983 to CINCPAC, 19 Jan 65.

27. (U) Msg, COMUSMACV to OASD(PA), 251029Z Jan 66, JCS IN 69652.

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Chapter 30

REINSTATING ROLLING THUNDER

Arguments for Resumption of Bombing

All during January 1966, as the United States refrained from bombing NVN in order to enhance its peace offensive, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the field commanders continued to press for a renewal of ROLLING THUNDER. Because they believed that the enemy was deriving both military and political advantages from the bombing halt, they sought this renewal at a substantially higher level--one that would quickly reduce Hanoi's temporary military advantage and that would be more apt to impel the enemy toward negotiation. Concerned over what they believed to be a serious military handicap and over the possibility that the United States was losing political leverage through its curtailment of pressure on the enemy, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 4 January sought CINCPAC's assessment of the situation. They asked him to evaluate the impact of the bombing suspension on the US/GVN negotiating posture and to provide such evidence as he had that the enemy was indeed increasing his military capabilities.¹

Within a few hours Admiral Sharp informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the continued suspension of ROLLING THUNDER was weakening the US/GVN negotiating position. By holding off air attacks on NVN, the United States was relinquishing the main pressure which might force Hanoi to negotiate. On the basis of the scant evidence then at hand, CINCPAC would not say that the enemy had increased his capabilities as a direct result of the standdown. Nevertheless, enemy buildup around Quang Tri and Saigon showed that the enemy meant to go ahead with operations as usual. There were signs that NVN was taking advantage of the pause to return to normal daytime operations, including the reconstruction and use of its LOCs. Because of an expected visit to Hanoi of a member of the Soviet Presidium, Mr. Alexander Shelepin, CINCPAC urged that the air attacks be resumed either before

1. (TS) JCS 2343/745, 3 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (14 Dec 65). (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9744 to CINCPAC, 4 Jan 66.

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his arrival or after his departure to avoid any possible serious incident. This visit was believed to be for the purpose of talking with NVN officials about negotiations. There was a possibility that this might lead to a communist initiative for talks.²

Based upon CINCPAC's evaluation and views, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended on 8 January that the bombing standdown be terminated within 48 hours after Mr. Shelepin's departure for Hanoi. In justification of this recommendation the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that Hanoi was using its immunity to repair LOCs, strengthen air defenses, and generally to recover from the ROLLING THUNDER damage of the past ten months. The costly bombing which had cut the enemy's capabilities in 1965 would be wasted unless expanded operations against NVN were mounted soon. The Joint Chiefs of Staff urged that the United States not wait for positive proof of infiltration, which was hard to confirm, but resume bombing on the basis of the enemy's known capability to improve his military posture.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff warned that it would become more difficult to break off the standdown as time passed. Protracted negotiations could be costly in American lives. The Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that early resumption of offensive air operations was essential "if we are to avoid a misinterpretation of US resolve in Southeast Asia, redress advantages accruing to the DRV from the standdown, and enter into meaningful negotiations from a position of strength."³

Before a reply was received to this recommendation, Admiral Sharp told the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 12 January, that when the United States resumed bombing NVN, which he believed would have to be done soon, it should bomb at a level that would force, rather than persuade, Hanoi to change its policies. He pointed out that the nature of the war had changed since ROLLING THUNDER first began. The United States should, therefore, now change the nature of ROLLING THUNDER. He was not sanguine about the chances of bring Hanoi to the conference table, although he considered that a negotiated

2. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 041658Z Jan 66, JCS IN 34531.

3. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-16-66 to SecDef, 8 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (5 Jan 66).

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solution would be "infinitely preferable to a long, bitter and costly war." Admiral Sharp wanted any future ROLLING THUNDER programs to achieve three essential objectives: 1) denial of external support to NVN; 2) destruction in depth of the resources already in NVN that contributed most to support of the aggression; destruction, or denial of all known permanent military facilities, and harassment and disruption of dispersed military operations; 3) harassment and obstruction of the movement of men and materials through southern NVN into Laos and RVN.

Admiral Sharp then recommended specific and strong actions against the NVN in order to attain these objectives. His cumulative proposals encompassed air attacks on all POL, all electrical power facilities, all large military installations, the mining of ports, the interdiction of all land LOCs from Communist China, and armed reconnaissance against LOCs in the northeast quadrant of NVN. He had also asked that intensified armed reconnaissance be flown on all routes south of the 20th Parallel with no restriction on the number of sorties.⁴

CINCPAC called attention to the high morale and tenacity of Communist forces. He attributed these qualities to the enemy's conviction that they could out-wait the United States. To generate "internal U.S. pressures" to end the war, the enemy was counting on inflicting high casualties. In accomplishing this purpose, he was willing to accept "staggering losses." Hanoi had, in CINCPAC's view, staged a "remarkable world-wide political and propaganda campaign" which had forced the United States into its present uncomfortable position. The communists had recognized that the political battle, not the military battle, was crucial and were now fighting to achieve a permanent standdown.⁵

On the same day that CINCPAC made his recommendations the Chief of Staff, Air Force, asserted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that the standdown in air operations against NVN must be "broken dramatically by attacks more forceful than any heretofore" in order to convey US determination clearly. He favored relatively unrestricted strikes against key target systems in NVN, with continuing intense effort until Hanoi stopped supporting the insurgencies. He recognized,

4. (76-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 120205Z Jan 66, JCS IN 46895.

5. Ibid.

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but discounted, the possibility of Chinese Communist intervention resulting from stepped-up bombing. General McConnell also recognized the danger of an adverse reaction in the noncommunist world, but was more concerned over whether or not the bombing would actually change NVN policy or limit significantly its support of the fighting in the South. He believed that it would.⁶

Accordingly, he recommended that the Joint Chiefs of Staff ask the Secretary of Defense to seek authority, immediately upon termination of the standdown, to direct the conduct of offensive air operations against key NVN military targets and to carry out sustained day and night armed reconnaissance to interdict major LOCs. If approved, these operations would be conducted "under minimum constraints beyond prohibition on the use of nuclear weapons and on attacks against the population in NVN."⁷

At their meeting that day the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the Joint Staff to prepare an air strike program for renewed air operations, taking into consideration the recommendations and views of CINCPAC and the Chief of Staff, Air Force. They approved the program thus developed on 17 January, and on the next day submitted recommendations and views generally paralleling those of CINCPAC and the Chief of Staff, Air Force.⁸

The Joint Chiefs of Staff advised the Secretary that the limited air strikes against the north of the type thus far conducted would not achieve the primary US objective of making NVN stop its support and direction of the aggression in RVN. Because ROLLING THUNDER attacks had been piecemeal, the enemy had enjoyed great freedom to replenish his forces, disperse his stocks, redirect his flow of materials and improve his defenses. The geographic restrictions and the limits on the number of sorties in NVN had kept the interdiction of the rail, highway, and waterway LOCs at an ineffective level. "Moreover," the Joint Chiefs of Staff observed, "these restrictions and the requirement for single coordinated attacks on specified targets have exposed our forces to greater risks."⁹

6. (TS-GP 3) CSAFM Y-32-66 to JCS, 12 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (5 Jan 66).

7. Ibid.

8. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/744-3, 15 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (5 Jan 66).

9. (TS-GP 3) JCSM 41-66 to SecDef, 18 Jan 65 (derived from JCS 2343/744-3), JMF 9155.3 (5 Jan 66).

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The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the course of action which they had proposed more than a year earlier, in November 1964, offered the best chance of gaining US objectives. A sharp aerial blow, and thereafter sustained and increasingly stronger attacks, would bring optimum results with least risk, casualties, and cost, and with the minimum chance that the enemy would mistake US intentions. The Joint Chiefs of Staff endorsed CINCPAC's three specific military objectives--cutting external support; destruction of important NVN resources and military facilities; and interruption of the flow of supplies and men southward.

With regard to closing the ports, particularly Haiphong, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that "military considerations" dictated the mining of ports immediately. However, because of the sensitivity of this question and the need for precise timing of the mining to mesh with political factors, they did not at this time make a direct recommendation that this be done. But the Joint Chiefs of Staff called directly and strongly for authority to destroy all POL storage and the associated system and the LOCs involved in support of southward movement. They also recommended intensified, around-the-clock, armed reconnaissance, without a limit on sorties. They assured the Secretary that all attacks would be designed to minimize civilian casualties. At the same time the MIG threat must be kept under constant surveillance and, if it interfered with operations in the North or was used against RVN, the MIG bases should be neutralized. The same principle, said the Joint Chiefs of Staff, applied to the SAM threat, and they recommended that the operational commander be given authority to deal with the SAMs as necessary to keep them from interfering with ROLLING THUNDER.¹⁰

Although a sharp increase in ROLLING THUNDER, and especially the mining of NVN ports, would bring an adverse international reaction, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that Free World leaders would go along with these moves because they recognized the problem and understood the need for these stronger measures. The Chinese Communists might enter the war directly, either through mistaken judgment or through a gradual escalation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed, however, that US restraint, if continued, might increase rather than lower the possibility of Chinese

10. Ibid.

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intervention. On the other hand, both the Free World and communist leaders could very well interpret continued restraint as vacillation.¹¹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff then recommended to the Secretary of Defense that: 1) the authorized area for offensive air operations be expanded to include all of NVN less the areas encompassed by a ten-mile radius around Hanoi/Phuc Yen airfield, a four-mile radius around Haiphong and a twenty-mile China buffer zone (exceptions permitting selected bombing in these areas would be carried out only if authorized); 2) numerical sortie limitations on armed reconnaissance in NVN be removed; and 3) no tactical restrictions or limitations be imposed upon the execution of the specific air strikes.¹²

On the day following submission of these recommendations, Secretary McNamara responded to the memorandum that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had sent him on 8 January saying, "As you know the problems surrounding resumption of the ROLLING THUNDER program are under continuing and active review within the government. Your recommendation and its supporting rationale will be given full consideration in this process." He said that he had forwarded their 8 January memorandum to the Secretary of State.¹³

The Secretary of State at about this same time received the views of CIA officials on the likely effect upon NVN capabilities of an accelerated ROLLING THUNDER program. These officials informed Secretary Rusk that greater bombing and interdiction of NVN would harass, disrupt, and impede the movement of men and material into RVN and make it much more difficult for NVN to support the insurgency. Nevertheless, NVN could still move substantially greater amounts into RVN than it had in 1965. The cumulative effect of US bombing would certainly set some limit to the expansion of the NVA and VC main force units and activities, but because of insufficient data no accurate estimate of this limit was possible. The enemy undoubtedly meant to expand further and to increase the firepower of his forces in SVN with modern, heavier weapons. The introduction of heavier mortars, 120mm, had already begun and light AAA might be moving in.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. (70-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Air Operations Against North Vietnam (U)," 19 Jan 66; (70-GP 3) Ltr, SecDef to SecState, 19 Jan 66; JMF 9155.3 (5 Jan 66).

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The level of reinforcement believed planned by the communists, 4,500 men per month with necessary supplies, would probably be achieved despite any US bombing program. If the US did not close the ports much of the impact of the bombing would be lost.¹⁴

Actions Recommended by the Field Commander

The valid evidence of accelerated enemy infiltration that had been lacking earlier began to appear in mid-January. General Westmoreland reported to Admiral Sharp on 17 January that aerial reconnaissance had detected large convoys moving southward during daylight. He urged immediate planning for a "maximum coordinated effort" to catch the enemy off guard on the first feasible day after ROLLING THUNDER was authorized. He wished to destroy as much enemy traffic as possible before it reverted back to night movement. COMUSMACV called also for strikes on preplanned targets in the wake of armed reconnaissance to wreak the greatest possible destruction of LOCs. In order to give US pilots at least 24 hours to exploit lucrative targets, General Westmoreland asked that public announcement of the resumption of bombing be withheld. Admiral Sharp agreed and on 20 January recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that ROLLING THUNDER be resumed without warning in order to assure destruction of "perishable targets."¹⁵

COMUSMACV, on 23 January, again called for immediate resumption of ROLLING THUNDER. Intelligence reports revealed that NVN was building up stockpiles just north of the DMZ and was continuing to infiltrate men and supplies through southeastern Laos. General Westmoreland was most concerned over the two northern provinces of RVN where US/RVNAF forces would have significant problems in "countering enemy initiatives" The enemy buildup and preparations in the I CTZ suggested that NVN might be readying a major VC/NVA offensive in the area. If the restrictions on air operations in NVN continued, COMUSMACV judged it essential that "we be provided

14. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, CIA to SecState et al., "Reactions to Continuation or Termination of the Pause in Air Attacks on the DRV," 19 Jan 66, OJCS File 091 Vietnam 1-20 Jan 66.

15. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 170515Z Jan 66, JCS IN 54398. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 201923Z Jan 66, JCS IN 60654.

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the authority to meet and deal with the threat of military offensive operations staging from the area immediately north of the DMZ." He wanted the area immediately north of the DMZ to be considered as an extension of RVN for air operations only. He had concluded that this was a military necessity to protect his forces in the I CTZ and to prevent the establishment of an enemy "sanctuary" immediately north of the DMZ.¹⁶

Admiral Sharp endorsed COMUSMACV's views on the threat facing his forces as a result of the continued standdown. On 24 January he "strongly" recommended that ROLLING THUNDER be resumed at once and at the intensity that he had proposed on 12 January. He said that if political reasons prevented a full resumption, US forces should at least be allowed to strike the targets in the southern area of NVN.¹⁷

The JCS Recommendations

On 25 January the Joint Chiefs of Staff followed up their 18 January memorandum to the Secretary of Defense with specific recommendations providing three alternatives for initiation of the program of air attacks against NVN. They recommended simultaneous armed reconnaissance operations against the LOCs and against the infiltration-associated NVN POL system. More carrier-based aircraft as well as US planes based in Thailand would be needed to support these operations. As soon as most perishable targets had been attacked, a follow-on program of armed reconnaissance and strikes against fixed targets such as LOC hubs and logistic centers would be carried out. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that air operations against NVN be initiated without any prior announcement in order to achieve maximum surprise and effectiveness. A draft planning message for Secretary McNamara's approval was included in their memorandum with the request that it be approved for dispatch "now" to allow CINCPAC maximum time for planning.¹⁸

16. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 231226Z Jan 66, JCS IN 65425.

17. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 240215Z Jan 66, JCS IN 65994.

18. (TS-GP 3) JCSM 56-66 to SecDef, 25 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (5 Jan 66).

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On the same day the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, asked CINCPAC to forward an outline plan for the first 24 hours of attacks after ROLLING THUNDER resumed. He told Admiral Sharp to base his plan on the following guidance: 1) strikes would be against perishable targets associated with infiltration of men and material into RVN; 2) POL targets not involved in LOC operations would not be included; 3) strikes would be restricted to the area south of Hanoi; and 4) fixed targets would be set forth along with "weight of effort" intended for each. Forces were to be kept on a 24-hour readiness status and should be capable of mounting more than 400 sorties in the first 24-hour period.¹⁹

Obviously Admiral Sharp had been anticipating such an order. His plan reached the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the same day. Since maximum success would depend upon a combination of surprise and good weather, CINCPAC suggested that authorization to resume ROLLING THUNDER be "on or after the selected date based on the tactical commander's analysis of the weather."²⁰

An Intelligence View of the "Peace Offensive"

While these actions aimed at reinstating ROLLING THUNDER were going on, US intelligence officials were analyzing the attitudes of communist and Free World nations on the stand-down. They paid particular attention to the chances for bringing Hanoi to the conference table and to the probable effects of resumption of bombing. In general, their conclusions supported military views that bombing should be resumed. On 20 January General Wheeler received from the CIA a memorandum, prepared in response to a State Department request, that made several pertinent judgments. The great bulk of the intelligence evidence showed that Hanoi was not ready to make significant concessions either to begin negotiations or to gain a prolonged halt in US bombing attacks. Hanoi's general attitude toward the pause and the US peace offensive indicated that its leaders would continue supporting the VC, even though they fully expected the United States to resume the bombings, probably on a wider scale. An indefinite continuation of the standdown in bombing would almost certainly convince Hanoi that to keep on fighting was to its

19. ~~(TS)~~ Telecon JCS to CINCPAC, 250209Z Jan 66, JCS In 68101.

20. ~~(TS)~~ Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 251930Z Jan 66, JCS IN 68633.

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best advantage. Nor did CIA believe that a prolonged pause would cause Hanoi to reduce its terms for a settlement so long as it still expected to win in RVN. The consensus was that Hanoi was prepared to accept the renewal of the bombing. Variations in the intensity and scope of bombing would probably not produce a significantly different response from NVN. While heavier bombing might present the enemy with greater physical difficulties, Hanoi would still support the insurgency and defend its airspace as best it could.

The Chinese evaluation of the immediate situation was believed to be similar to that of Hanoi. But Communist China believed that larger stakes were involved and feared that negotiations would reinforce "a Soviet-US collaboration" to isolate China. The CHICOMS were known to have urged on Hanoi a hard line during the pause and had publicly warned against entering into any dealings with the United States. The continuation of a bombing pause would encourage Peking since it would seem that the chances of a war with the United States had been reduced and that their air forces would not be compelled to defend NVN. They had undoubtedly pointed out to Hanoi that the pause was a sign of US weakness and that their policies were thus justified. If the United States renewed or even stepped up its bombing, the Communist Chinese would still count on eventual victory through "peoples war" tactics. While they would probably send greater help to NVN under such circumstances, they would not intervene with aircraft or infantry.²¹

The CIA believed that the USSR probably took a more complicated view of the renewal of bombing. While the Soviet Union had reaffirmed its commitments to Hanoi only recently, it had also made a slight effort to bring the United States and NVN into political contact in the hope of preventing further escalation. This effort had apparently failed, and now the Soviets saw no reasonable alternative but to continue supporting Hanoi while awaiting another opportunity for diplomacy. A continued bombing pause would not be misinterpreted by Soviet officials. They would discern the reason behind it but would also be somewhat relieved because the pause limited the risks of their own involvement. Russia would continue to supply military aid to NVN, but would try to keep the movement for negotiation alive in order to avoid escalation of the conflict.

21. (S-GP 1) Memo, CIA to SecState, et al., "Reactions to Continuation or Termination of the Pause in Air Attacks on the DRV," 19 Jan 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 1-20 Jan 66.

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Most noncommunist countries were relieved at the suspension of bombing and hoped that negotiations would come about. Except for Japan, however, the Asian governments allied with the United States would be distressed by an extension of the bombing pause. In RVN particularly, morale would be lowered and doubts as to US constancy would grow. Japanese public opinion, in contrast, had been hardening against US actions in Vietnam, particularly the bombing of the North. European nations generally would be disappointed by any US resumption of bombing and this disappointment would be directed against the United States. If the bombing were renewed immediately after Tet, and especially if it were stepped up, many noncommunist nations would blame the United States to a much greater degree.

The Peace Offensive Fails

Tet came and went but the US peace offensive brought nothing but silence or disdainful rejection from the major nations of the communist bloc. Reviewing the 29-day diplomatic effort on 21 January, Secretary of State Rusk said that there had been overwhelming favorable response to US efforts "except from those who could, in fact, sit down and make peace." Rusk asserted that the United States had provided Hanoi every opportunity to make some serious response but that none had been received. He cited the US purpose in RVN as "peace under law," but repeated President Johnson's statement of the previous day that " . . . the door of peace must be kept wide open for all who wish to avoid the scourge of war. But the door of aggression must be closed and bolted if man himself is to survive." He concluded by pledging that the United States would do what it could to bring peace to Southeast Asia and what it must "to prevent the success of cruel aggression."²²

When, in the last ten days of the month, the bombing pause and the sustained political efforts to bring the enemy to the conference table did not elicit a favorable response, President Johnson informed foreign capitals that the US Government could not continue "to expose its forces and the forces of its allies to jeopardy." He took this position in light of the following considerations: 1) that both direct and indirect approaches to Hanoi had gone unheeded and had been met with denunciations of US motives in suspending the bombing; 2) reliable evidence indicated that NVN had continued the infiltration of men and equipment through Laos into RVN; and 3) the VC had violated their own ceasefire.

²². NY Times, 22 Jan 62, p. 1.

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As a result the US Government concluded that further efforts along the same tack would yield no positive results. On the other hand, the military situation of the US/RVN in Vietnam could be expected to worsen under the existing self-imposed restrictions.²³

ROLLING THUNDER is Resumed

On 28 January General Wheeler instructed the Joint Staff to prepare for him a draft implementing message for resumption of ROLLING THUNDER. This draft was prepared in line with guidance furnished by the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC's outline plan. The next morning General Wheeler took the draft ROLLING THUNDER "execute" message (ROLLING THUNDER 48) with him and presented it for approval at a meeting of the NSC. Upon approval by the President of the message, the Chairman ordered the bombing directive be sent to CINCPAC. The provisions for resumption of bombing that had been incorporated into this message fell far short of the stronger action which CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had been urging upon the Secretary of Defense.²⁴

Admiral Sharp was directed to resume bombing NVN at 0001 on 31 January (Saigon time) but to limit this bombing to armed reconnaissance of designated areas and routes. "Intensive day and night armed recce will be conducted, with emphasis during first twenty four hours, to seek out and destroy moving targets." Secondary targets such as pontoon bridges, truck parks and dispersed storage areas would be struck if moving targets could not be found. Key infiltration routes into Laos and the principal north-south rail, highway, and water LOCs would receive first attention, but follow-on strikes could be mounted against other LOC routes and static installations. CINCPAC was limited to a total of 300 armed reconnaissance strike sorties during each 24-hour period. Tactical surprise was to be achieved if at all possible, and he was directed to execute all strikes to the degree feasible on 31 January, regardless of weather conditions.

23. (S-GP 3) Msg, State Circ 1387, 22 Jan 66. (S) Msg, State Circ 1410, 26 Jan 66.

24. (TS) Interv, James F. Schnabel with CAPT McKee, USN, J-3, Pac Div, 9 Feb 66. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2830 to CINCPAC, 292126Z Jan 66.

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Not only were fixed targets excluded from RT 48, but the geographic limits for armed reconnaissance were set well below what they had been before the bombing halt.²⁵ The limiting line thus established prevented armed reconnaissance over all of the northwest portion of NVN which had previously been open for attack.²⁶

CINCPAC, however, was not so disappointed as might have been expected. Admiral Sharp told General Wheeler on 30 January, "ROLLING THUNDER 48 gets us off to a running start." He felt that the "constraints" imposed were understandable but that "hopefully" they would be offset by the element of surprise. Nevertheless he wanted his earlier flexibility in bombing NVN restored as soon as possible. The authorized limit of 300 sorties would, Admiral Sharp believed, "give us excellent freedom of action for the initial period" and would punish the enemy if the weather were favorable.²⁷

President Johnson informed the major allies on 29 January that the United States intended to resume bombing NVN on 31 January. He emphasized that this decision had been reached only after thoughtful consideration and intensive effort toward negotiation. The decision was received with disappointment but understanding by most countries of the Free World and with indifference by communist governments. Any remaining hope for the success of the US peace initiative was dashed on 31 January when the NVN representative who had been contacted earlier through Rangoon informed the US representative, in an aide memoire, that NVN rejected the US position and declared that the only basis for a political settlement was the US acceptance of the NVN four points.²⁸

25. Latitude 20°31' N westward to longitude 105°20' E, due north to latitude 21° N, due west to Laos border.

26. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2820 to CINCPAC, 292126Z Jan 66.

27. (TS) Msg, JCS 0451-66 to CINCPAC, 29 Jan 66; (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 300510Z Jan 66; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 1-20 Jan 66.

28. (S) Msg, State 595 to Canberra, et al., 29 Jan 66; (S) Msgs, State Circs 1434, 20 Jan; 1437 and 1440, 30 Jan 66. (S-GP 3) Msg, State Circ 1438, 30 Jan 66. (S-GP 1) Msg, Rangoon 391 to State, 31 Jan 66.

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On 30 January Ambassador Lodge confirmed his support of renewed bombing adding, "We should bring all possible conventional firepower to bear on the enemy, which is exactly what he is doing to us with every means at his disposal. If our forbearance and efforts have not by now convinced world opinion of our desire for peace, and their desire for conquest, they never will. We should stop worrying about it and hit the enemy with all available conventional means."29

High hopes for a lucrative initiation of ROLLING THUNDER were not realized. Attacks in the first 24 hours of RT 48 were severely restricted by adverse weather conditions. Of 274 USN and USAF sorties, 100 were diverted and 71 cancelled outright. Of the remaining sorties, only 56 struck targets.30

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29. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 2192 to Saigon, 29 Jan 66. (S)
Msg, Saigon 2731 to State, 30 Jan 66.
30. (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 26-66, 1 Feb 66.

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Chapter 31

ROLLING THUNDER - PLANNING AND POLICY FEBRUARY-JUNE 1966

The Joint Chiefs of Staff continued during 1966 to approach the matter of air operations more aggressively than did other advisors to the President. The air measures proposed by the field commanders to counter enemy support of the war in the South were generally approved and supported by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The reactions at the State and OSD levels and at the NSC/White House advisory levels were consistently more conservative.

The Spring and early Summer of 1966 became a period in which pressures mounted and issues were joined. Advocating stronger actions against NVN, military authorities sought to persuade their civilian superiors that time was running out on moderation. In this period decisions of great consequence took shape slowly but steadily. Repeated military recommendations, backed by that most cogent of arguments, the failure of extant measures to achieve US objectives, almost consistently brought grudging approval for stronger military actions.

The story of US planning and policy for the use of its air power in Southeast Asia during 1966 can best be told in terms of this gradual acceptance by the President of military recommendations for stronger air actions against the enemy. Proposals from the field that early in the year seemed to have little chance of being accepted had, by mid-1966, been accepted in principle and some had been put into effect.

The Target Systems

The main military objective that the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC sought in ROLLING THUNDER during 1966 was the destruction or neutralization of the principal systems supporting enemy infiltration of men and supplies into RVN. These were NVN LOCs and POL. The recommendations by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC in mid-January set the stage for additional strong efforts to

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secure Presidential authority for effective attacks on these systems. Acquisition of this authority was complicated and hampered by uncertainty in the minds of some of the President's advisors about the actual military value of destroying the POL and LOCs. Beyond this, a general belief that adverse political effects would result from any large-scale attacks to knock out these systems inhibited efforts to secure the requisite authority. Nevertheless, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC persevered during the first half of 1966 in their attempts to persuade the President that the best way to reduce substantially the enemy infiltration was to destroy the means by which he moved.

The LOCs

The NVN rail lines and highways outside the restricted areas had been attacked during 1965. Hanoi's ports and related facilities, however, had remained immune from attack. The continuing recommendations by the Joint Chiefs of Staff aimed at more effectively interdicting the rail lines and highways in NVN and at curtailing the operations at NVN ports.

The necessity for increased efforts against the rail system, particularly in northern NVN, was underscored on 11 January when the Secretary of Defense inquired of the Joint Chiefs of Staff why the rail lines leading from Hanoi to China were still operable despite US air attacks. He asked also what air actions would be required to "successfully interdict" these lines and if the cost in lives would be offset by "adverse effect of the interdiction" on NVN.¹

The key to putting these lines out of operation lay in the effective interdiction of the major bridges. This had not been accomplished, owing to bad weather, operational restrictions, and the enemy's repair capability. General Wheeler explained on 25 January that interdiction could be accomplished and the lines kept inoperative by "a commitment of approximately 750 strike/combat support sorties monthly providing six strikes per month on each line. . . ." Based on experience to date, these operations would cost

1. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 11 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (5 Jan 66).

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the United States four aircraft destroyed and one crew member killed each month. General Wheeler stated that the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that these costs would be warranted by the impact upon NVN and RVN.²

Mining the Ports

One million short tons had been imported into NVN in 1965, 70 percent by sea, mostly through the port of Haiphong. It would obviously be advantageous to stop this flow and the Joint Chiefs of Staff fully realized this. Their proposal of August 1965 that Haiphong and smaller ports at Hon Gay and Cam Pha be cut off by aerial mining of their approaches had been sent to the State Department for assessment of political risks, but by the beginning of 1966 no reply had been received. They had again raised the problem without making a specific recommendation on 18 January.³

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had followed this course because they realized the serious political consequences that could arise from mining the ports. US intelligence estimates substantiated that reactions, even among nations friendly to the United States, would be adverse in most cases. Since much of the shipping then using NVN ports was of Free World origin, to mine the ports and possibly to destroy ships from such nations as Great Britain could alienate America's friends. Communist nations, particularly the Soviet Union, could be expected to protest any mining of NVN ports vigorously and possibly to attempt some type of action against the United States in the United Nations. It was unlikely, however, that the Soviet Union would risk sending its ships into NVN harbors known to be mined.⁴

2. (TS) CM-1134-66 to SecDef, 25 Jan 66, same file.

3. (TS-GP 1) J-3 TP for CJCS, "Mining Haiphong Approaches," 7 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (8 Mar 66). (TS-GP 1) JCSM-608-66 to SecDef, 8 Aug 65 (derived from JCS 2343/566-4); (TS-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 18 Aug 65, encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/566, 19 Aug 65; JMF 9155.3 (6 Mar 65) sec 2.

4. (S-GP 1) Memo, CIA to SecState et al., "Reaction to Continuation or Termination of the Pause in Air Attacks on the DRV," 19 Jan 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 1-20 Jan 66.

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Closing main seaports to normal shipping would force NVN to turn to rail, small craft and coastal shipping and would also force a reduction of some imports. But the chances of stopping all shipping would not be very promising. Even if the ports were closed effectively, NVN could shift to use of shallow-draft coastal shipping and off-loading by lighters. Rail transport from China could be reduced drastically, but, based on experience in World War II and Korea, could not be completely cut off. Road transport would probably be expanded. While mining could reduce the level of imports substantially, the enemy could still bring in enough supplies to meet its minimum domestic needs and support the war in RVN.

POL

A study by the Joint Staff in January revealed that NVN facilities to receive, store and distribute POL products were particularly vulnerable to air attack at that time. Only a tiny fraction of the 172,000 MT of POL imported in 1965 came from Communist China, the rest coming by ship from the Soviet Union to Haiphong, the only NVN port capable of receiving bulk oil shipments. Within the country distribution was normally by railroad but by early 1966 the ROLLING THUNDER rail interdiction program had compelled the extensive use of highway and waterway carriers for POL distribution. US reconnaissance and intelligence had identified 13 significant POL storage areas in NVN. Before the US air strikes had taken their toll, these contained 97 percent of the estimated 216,000 MT total national storage capacity. Attacks on four of these areas had destroyed some of this storage, leaving about 179,000 MT of POL capacity. Over half of the remaining POL capacity was located in two storage sites, one in a lightly populated area near Hanoi and the other similarly located in Haiphong. One development which disturbed US planners was the dispersal of the POL stocks away from these concentrated storage areas into small buried facilities, which gave greater protection and reduced the value of the POL targets. Because of their small capacities these dispersed sites were worthy only of armed reconnaissance attack. The Joint Staff wanted the main POL storage areas attacked before NVN succeeded in fully dispersing its POL. The most important single target within the POL system was the storage at Haiphong,

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with over 40 percent of the total remaining known POL bulk storage. If 85 percent of the capacity at Haiphong were destroyed, the port would not be able to handle arriving shipments.⁵

The case for destroying the POL was somewhat strengthened by a joint J-3/DIA report that NVN was becoming more dependent on the use of motor vehicles. Eight hundred NVN vehicles had been destroyed by bombing in 1965, but this loss had been more than offset by importation from Communist China and the Soviet Union of about 2,000 vehicles in the same period. Hanoi had asked the Soviet Union for 2,700 additional vehicles and was seeking about 1,000 more from Communist China and the European satellite nations. According to the J-3/DIA report, NVN already had about 10,000-12,000 motor vehicles but required more because US bombing had increased the mileage that vehicles must travel and had increased the number of trucks needed to accomplish a ton-mile movement.⁶

Infiltration into RVN

As in earlier years, the principal infiltration route into RVN ran through Laos, where 500 miles of developed road as well as numerous trails led down the heavily forested panhandle. Using large numbers of men and great energy, Hanoi was keeping about 200 miles of this road net open year round, from the 17th Parallel southward through Laos to the Ca Mau Peninsula in RVN. Hanoi had also begun sending men and supplies into RVN through the DMZ. Although the DMZ was, under the terms of the 1954 Geneva Accords, to remain free of armed forces, the VC had operated in the DMZ for some time. By 1966 the enemy had stepped up infiltration directly from NVN into RVN through the zone, and appeared ready to intensify his activities in the zone even more. US planes had detected many camouflaged roads and trail nets running through the DMZ along with new road construction and support structures.⁷

5. (TS) J-3/DIA Study, "Attack on the North Vietnam Petroleum Storage System--A Study," 23 Apr 65 (Revised 24 Jan 66), OCJCS Bulky File 091 Vietnam Jan 66.

6. Ibid.

7. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 22-24.

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The Intelligence View

CIA experts informed the Secretary of State in late January that even the maximum level of air attacks proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff would not have a critical impact on the combat ability of the communist forces in RVN. They pointed out that the requirement for outside supply of the communist forces then in RVN was estimated to average only about 12 tons a day. Even with the communist force increases projected for 1966 by MACV, and at greatly intensified levels of combat, this requirement would average no more than 165 tons a day. The weakest part of the enemy LOCs, the Lao corridor, could carry about 400 tons a day, despite the current high levels of bombing in Laos.⁸

Another intelligence analysis produced at this time stated that enemy forces in RVN required only a small amount of external supply. The enemy supplied themselves with the food and POL they needed from sources within RVN. During 1965 it was estimated the VC/NVA in RVN had received 5-10,000 tons of outside supplies and that some of these had been put into stockpiles. The trend was rising, however, with greater demands in sight as a result of the increased infiltration from the North, the introduction of heavier weapons, and the standardization on the 7.62mm family of weapons. It appeared that as a result the total 1966 requirement would be substantially higher than the 1965 requirement. The communists were not using their existing LOCs between NVN and RVN at anywhere near capacity. Nevertheless, they were making a strong effort to increase their infiltration capabilities, probably in anticipation of increased requirements and to provide a greater margin of excess capacity in order to keep operating under the intensified aerial attack.⁹

RT 49

When, early in February, the Secretary of Defense visited CINCPAC's headquarters in Hawaii, Admiral Sharp's staff described for him the dimensions and nature of the

8. (S-GP 1) Memo, CIA to SecState et al., "Reaction to Continuation or Termination of the Pause in Air Attacks on the DRV," 19 Jan 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 1-20 Jan 66.

9. (TS) SNIE 10-1-66, 4 Feb 66.

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air effort that would be required to force a major reduction in the importation of war material into NVN and to curtail the infiltration into the South. To accomplish these tasks 7,100 sorties per month would be required. Sixty percent of these would be interdiction sorties to cut the overland flow of materials into and through the Hanoi/Haiphong complex, ten percent would be used against key port facilities and "high value" targets within the Hanoi/Haiphong areas, with the remaining 30 percent directed against LOCs supporting infiltration into RVN directly.¹⁰

On 12 February Secretary McNamara, recalling this briefing, intimated to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, that CINCPAC had recommended a monthly level of 6,000 combat sorties in NVN. He asked General Wheeler to review ROLLING THUNDER operations at a level of 200 sorties per day against the area presently authorized, plus the northwest quadrant. He said that the northeast quadrant of NVN, that area of northern NVN which included the Hanoi/Haiphong complex, "posed special difficulty" at this time. He stated that CINCPAC should assume that he would be required to stay within a limit of 6,000 sorties but could carry over the sorties not flown on a given day because of bad weather or other operational factors.

The difference between the recommended 7,100 sorties and the 6,000-sortie figure which Mr. McNamara was now using stemmed, General Wheeler believed, from his having subtracted the recommended effort against "key port facilities and high value targets" in the northeast quadrant.

General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp on 13 February that he believed that authority to carry over sorties would increase the field commanders' flexibility. He added that he expected the Joint Chiefs of Staff to propose, "without being sanguine of immediate acceptance," reduction of the buffer zone along the CHICOM border and the Hanoi sanctuary, operations against the "POL complex," and the opening of the northeast quadrant for armed reconnaissance.¹¹

10. (TS-GP 3) Memo, ASD(ISA) for CJCS et al., "CINCPAC Briefings on Southeast Asia," 11 Feb 66, JMF 9155.3 (11 Jan 66).

11. (TS) NMCC Telecon, CJCS to CINCPAC, 132000Z Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66.

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On 16 February Admiral Sharp informed the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, that, given the restriction on operations in the northeast quadrant, he could profitably use at least 6,000 sorties in the south and northwest. The real limiting factor was the bad weather which, unless it improved significantly, would probably prevent even 6,000 sorties a month from being flown. He told General Wheeler that, while the general briefing had set 7,100 sorties as a goal, he had in private conversations told Secretary McNamara he would prefer 7,400 sorties per month. Even this figure was not optimum, but represented a compromise solution based on the total forces and ordnance estimated to be available in Southeast Asia during CY 1966.¹²

On 19 February the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented the Secretary of Defense with the review of ROLLING THUNDER he had requested. They pointed out that if the northeast quadrant presented great problems and could not be attacked in the near future, two alternative courses of action were open. The United States could resume armed reconnaissance throughout the area authorized just before the Christmas truce on 24 December 1965; or it could reduce the excluded areas in the northeast quadrant and carry out operations throughout the redefined quadrant.¹³

With respect to the first alternative, practically all of the JCS fixed targets in the area had been struck and the expenditure of 6,000 sorties per month would be primarily against the LOCs and related targets. This would have little effect on Hanoi. In the absence of authority to strike all of the northeast quadrant, the preferable course would be to redefine the northeast quadrant to allow attacks against all NVN, less the area north and east of a line from the coast, passing four miles south of Haiphong, ten miles south and west of Hanoi/Phuc Yen airfield, and north of a 20-nm buffer zone along the CHICOM border. This would open up for attack about 650 miles of major rail, road, and water LOCs, 5,000 square miles of area, and 18 JCS numbered targets.

12. (28-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 160315Z Feb 66, JCS in 14408.

13. (28-GP 3) JCSM-113-66 to SecDef, 19 Feb 66, JMF 9155.3 (17 Feb 66).

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In any case, so long as the northeast quadrant remained sacrosanct, air power could not effectively attack the influx of support to NVN. Denial of this support was, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated, essential to the accomplishment of US military objectives in Vietnam. Because of this bar on attacks against remunerative targets and lucrative interdiction areas, greater effort must be made in other areas to compensate partially for a "self-imposed operational restriction." The Joint Chiefs of Staff commended to the Secretary as the "soundest program from a military standpoint," which offered "the greatest return for air effort expended against NVN," the program that they had forwarded to him a month earlier, on 18 January. This program was the minimum essential effort against NVN needed to further US military objectives in Southeast Asia. But if other than military considerations forbade such a program, they recommended, as an alternative, the redefinition of the northeast quadrant, and authority for CINCPAC to employ a monthly total of 7,400 combat sorties in NVN and 3,000 in Laos, and to use his resources as weather and operational factors dictated. Failing that, they asked that, at the least, the present area of RT 48 operations be expanded to include the area authorized for attack as of 24 December 1965, and that CINCPAC be granted the same flexibility he enjoyed at that time. "If for nonmilitary reasons," the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded, "an operational limitation must be established through sortie allocation, such allocation should be on a monthly rather than a daily basis in order to enhance CINCPAC's flexibility."¹⁴

The new ROLLING THUNDER package, RT 49, approved by the President on 26 February, reflected to a degree the JCS views. The armed reconnaissance area was restored to that existing on 24 December 1965, as was the IRON HAND area. A total of 8,100 combat sorties were authorized for Laos and NVN, 5,100 for NVN and 3,000 for Laos, on a monthly basis. Effective 1 March, RT 49 had no terminal date since the monthly sortie authorization would not require a monthly renewal. Sorties could be interchanged between Laos and NVN as weather and operational factors dictated. RT 49 also reinstated the authority for coastal armed reconnaissance north of 20° 31' N to a point 25 nm from

¹⁴. Ibid.

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the CHICOM border, which had been originally authorized on 18 December but not included in RT 48.15

General Wheeler, on 26 February, informed Admiral Sharp that RT 49 was a step in the right direction despite several outstanding defects, such as lack of authority for IRON HAND in the northeast quadrant and the maintenance of the quadrant itself as a sanctuary. "I propose to push ahead in these areas in the weeks to come," he told CINCPAC. He asked him to keep a close eye on the results of RT 49 and to submit any comments and recommendations for improvement. He was particularly concerned by the greater threat now posed to US aircraft by SA-2s and by higher-grade MIG aircraft in the northeast quadrant.16

Mining of NVN Ports

At the beginning of March the question of mining NVN ports again came under scrutiny. In providing the Secretary of Defense a concept of operations for Southeast Asia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 1 March included provisions for aerial mining of NVN ports together with interdiction of inland waterways, coastal waters, harbors, and water LOCs.17

On the following day, 2 March 1966, Ambassador Lodge reported a VC attack on a friendly vessel in the Saigon channel and requested Washington consideration of possible retaliatory strikes against Haiphong Harbor. He suggested mining of the Haiphong channel as being preferable to bombing or naval blockade. CINCPAC agreed with Ambassador Lodge that the mining of Haiphong channel was the most appropriate means of reprisal. Plans had already been prepared and could be put into effect with only 72 hours notice.18

15. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4888 to CINCPAC, 26 Feb 66; (TS) Memo, no sig /J-3 Pac Div/, to CJCS, 25 Feb 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65), sec 6, ROLLING THUNDER 49.

16. (TS) Msg, JCS 0950-66 to CINCPAC, 26 Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66.

17. (TS-GP 1) J-3 TP 7-66, 7 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (8 Mar 66), (TS-GP 3) JCSM-130-66 to SecDef, 1 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2343/760-5), JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66) sec 3.

18. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 3168 to State, 2 Mar 66, JCS IN 39000. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 6 Mar 66, JCS IN 44988.

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After considering the recommendations of Ambassador Lodge and CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 10 March requested the Secretary of Defense to approve the total air campaign against NVN proposed on 18 January, "with earliest attack" on the NVN POL storage target system, followed by interdiction of the principal LOCs from China and mining of NVN deep-water ports. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the recent VC attacks on shipping in the Saigon channel had diminished the political sensitivity of NVN harbor mining.¹⁹

The Secretary of Defense waited several weeks before replying that he would consider the JCS recommendations in future ROLLING THUNDER decisions. The mining of NVN harbors was never approved, however.²⁰

COMUSMACV Proposes a Shift In Air Effort

The intelligence analysis of early February that had indicated possible increased infiltration proved correct. By mid-March General Westmoreland was reporting greatly accelerated efforts by the enemy to infiltrate through Laos and the western portion of the DMZ.²¹

General Westmoreland believed that it was of greater immediate importance to attack and destroy the enemy's infiltration capabilities in southern NVN and in the Laotian panhandle than it was to attack NVN facilities in the northern area of NVN (north of Vinh) which he described as the "strategic rear." On 17 March he informed CINCPAC and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, that the enemy was moving men and supplies into RVN at an accelerated rate, obviously bent on maximum reinforcement before bad weather closed his routes through Laos. COMUSMACV recommended, therefore, that the weight of air effort be shifted southward to the routes running through southern NVN and Laos. In this effort no arbitrary sortie limits should be set. The weight of effort could be shifted back to the enemy's "strategic

19. (S-GP 3) JCSM-153-66 to SecDef, 10 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2343/790), JMF 9155.3 (8 Mar 66).

20. (U) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 28 Mar 66, Encl to JCS 2343/790-1, 30 Mar 66, same file.

21. (S-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 08328 to CINCPAC, 17 Mar 66, JCS IN 64653.

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rear" in about six weeks, after bad weather curtailed enemy infiltration in the South. COMUSMACV also asked that, because the enemy was infiltrating through the western DMZ, bombing restrictions in that area of the DMZ be removed.²²

Admiral Sharp disagreed with COMUSMACV that strikes in northern NVN should be set aside and "all our effort concentrated in the Laos Panhandle and southern NVN." CINCPAC did not consider the enemy's "strategic rear" to be in NVN but "out of country" where "hardware of the war making potential" was generated. The United States, although it could not strike at the source, could strike at this hardware close to points of entry in NVN before it was dispersed over the LOCs. Interdiction "in depth" was needed to destroy enemy resources, to increase his repair problems and to force him to spread his defenses over a wider area. CINCPAC agreed with COMUSMACV that the DMZ should be attacked, but wanted bombing to be conducted throughout the DMZ, excepting only centers of population.²³

On 4 April, the Chairman informed CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that the Joint-Chiefs of Staff concurred in the objective of causing as much damage and disruption to the enemy's infiltration efforts in the South as could be inflicted during the remaining good weather. A "substantial" weight of effort was being assigned against LOCs in southern NVN and Laos in current ROLLING THUNDER and STEEL TIGER programs. Further intensive studies were taking place to determine the enemy infiltration patterns and methods. However, the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not believe that it was necessary to concentrate on the southern LOCs at the expense of the "strategic rear." Interdiction of the area north of Vinh was also important and should be applied "throughout maximum depth." As to sortie restrictions, the present limit was well above those needed by commanders, particularly in view of the bad weather. With regard to the DMZ, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were preparing a recommendation that some air operations be authorized there.²⁴

22. (S-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 08328 to CINCPAC, 17 Mar 66, JCS IN 64653. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 08332 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 17 Mar 66, JCS IN 64994.

23. (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV 19045Z Mar 66, JCS IN 69320.

24. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 7643 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 4 Apr 66.

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The Search for Expanded Authority - RT 50

The current ROLLING THUNDER program to which General Wheeler had referred was RT 50, developed in the last ten days of March and containing much stronger provisions than had its predecessor. General Wheeler had begun action on this program by discussing its parameters and objectives with Secretary McNamara on 21 March. On the next day the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, reported to Admiral Sharp that the Secretary had broached the possibility that a "controlled armed recce program" might be authorized within the northeast quadrant. As visualized by Secretary McNamara, the program would permit a level of 600-700 strike sorties against LOCs in the northeast quadrant to be charged against the current authorization of 8,100 sorties for Laos and NVN. He had informed the Chairman that, although he would not remove the restrictions on the sanctuary areas along the Chinese border or around Hanoi/Haiphong, strikes against a cement plant and associated power plant in the Haiphong area might be considered along with strikes against two or three of the major bridges on the Hanoi/Lao Cai rail line.²⁵

General Wheeler expressed concern to CINCPAC that Secretary McNamara continued to believe that ROLLING THUNDER had had relatively little effect on the enemy. This belief had apparently been strengthened by General Westmoreland's recent recommendations for shifting the air effort from the enemy's "strategic rear". "To say that this attitude disturbs me is to put it mildly because this conviction is used to argue against expansion of the air campaign against highly remunerative targets such as the POL system," General Wheeler concluded.²⁶

Although Admiral Sharp was anxious to resume operations in the northeast quadrant, he informed General Wheeler on 25 March that to do so with only 600 to 700 sorties a month would merely harass the enemy and would not reduce his external support significantly. Because the enemy had built up his air defenses and improved his ability to repair LOCs, any effective operations in the northeast quadrant would require "a large scale support effort" against air defenses

25. (TS) Msg, JCS 1508-66 to CINCPAC, 22 Mar 66.

26. Ibid.

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and a very heavy effort to destroy his LOCs and to keep them inoperable. CINCPAC estimated that 2,500 strike and support sorties would be required monthly in the northeast quadrant.²⁷

CINCPAC proposed that, if he was to be directed to make less than "an optimum effort" in the northeast quadrant, initial operations be concentrated on destroying all known POL storage and distribution facilities in the quadrant, rather than dispersing an inadequate number of sorties against several target systems. The weight of effort needed to destroy the enemy's POL would be negligible compared to that needed for an effective interdiction program.

Admiral Sharp informed the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, that to "go into the northeast" as proposed by the Secretary of Defense was not the answer to the problem. "Results can be expected to be inadequate," he said, "and the current criticisms will only be intensified because of certain increase in losses." He stated that the United States should not go into the area without objectives worth the risk. These were the objectives he had proposed on 12 January. "If not those," he concluded, "then POL."²⁸

Secretary McNamara had raised other aspects of the POL problem with General Wheeler during their discussions on 21 March. He had asked, for example, if it would be wise to attack the POL system in the absence of a decision to mine the ports. He had also asked what follow-up air actions would have to be carried out once the main POL storage facilities were destroyed, which elements of the POL system would have to be attacked, and how many sorties would be needed. Although concerned that attacks on the POL would trigger MIG reaction, Secretary McNamara had assured General Wheeler that he would assist in getting approval for strikes against the POL system and for a controlled reconnaissance program in the northeast quadrant.²⁹

27. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS 250850Z Mar 66.

28. Ibid.

29. (TS) Note to Control Div, "ROLLING THUNDER 50," 23 Mar 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65), ROLLING THUNDER 50.

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On 26 March, in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that RT 50, a program of air strikes which took into account CINCPAC's proposals on POL, be initiated on 1 April. They noted that controlled armed reconnaissance in the northeast would place additional pressures on NVN. A monthly rate of 600 sorties would be sufficient against the rail lines and the three principal highways in the northeast quadrant. If another 300 sorties were added, the principal alternate routes could also be interdicted effectively. Further strikes to destroy the key bridges on these main routes should be conducted and other JCS targets restructured.³⁰

The materials needed by NVN to repair its bombed bridges and highways should also be destroyed. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended bombing the Haiphong cement plant, the Thai Nguyen iron and steel combine, and a large TPP collocated with the Haiphong cement plant. Because of the nearby enemy MIGs, planes on these missions should attack and destroy the early warning and ground control intercept (EW/GCI) at Kep airfield. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also recommended attacks against nine POL storage areas, including those at Hanoi and Haiphong, and against six bridges, three of which had been struck previously.

They assured Secretary McNamara that, quite apart from the question of whether or not NVN ports were to be mined, the POL receiving, handling, storage, and distribution systems should be destroyed because of NVN's great dependence on POL. Follow-on attacks should also be made against Haiphong facilities, which included the only deep-water facility for offloading tankers.

As US attacks on the POL came closer to Phuc Yen and Kep, said the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the probability of MIG attacks on US planes would increase. NVN had 78 MIGs in the Hanoi/Kep area, two-thirds of them operational. Although US pilots could defeat them, US plane losses would be inevitable. From a strictly military point of view, the enemy air capability should be destroyed before the bombing of the POL. Because of the political risks involved in

30. (S-GP 3) JCSM-189-66 to SecDef, 26 Mar 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 50.

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such actions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were willing to accept the military danger for the moment and not to attack the MIGs. They recommended, however, destroying EW and GCI at Kep airfield. At the point when the MIGs interfered with US strike operations the enemy jets and their bases should be attacked.³¹

On 31 March the Secretary of Defense discussed with the President the air program proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The President approved this program with respect to the southern and northwestern quadrants of NVN. Of the 8,100 combat sorties authorized, 900 could be used in the northeast quadrant "at the discretion of the military commands." He authorized attacks against six main roads and three railroads within the quadrant but outside the Hanoi 30-mile circle and the Haiphong 10-mile circle and outside the 25-30 mile strip nearest China. Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended six bridges for attack, only four were approved. The strikes which the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended against the Haiphong cement plant/TPP, against seven POL storage facilities including Hanoi and Haiphong, against the Kep EW/GCI, and against Viet Tri Railroad/Highway Bridge were deferred. Secretary McNamara ordered these targets deferred until specifically authorized, but directed that specific plans be made to carry out strikes against them in April.³²

General Wheeler was disappointed by the deferment of these ten targets. But he informed Admiral Sharp that he was "happy to state" that he was "confident authority will be forthcoming in the near future." In his view this authority was being withheld for international political reasons--the Communist Party Congress was in session but would terminate its meeting on or about 7 April.³³

The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, was concerned that US planes would suffer heavy losses upon entering the northeast quadrant, which the enemy had turned into

31. Ibid.

32. (S) Memo for Pres, no sig, /SecDef/, "April program of air strikes against North Vietnam and Laos," /with SecDef notations/, 31 Mar 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 50.

33. (S) Msg, JCS 1711-66 to CINCPAC, 31 Mar 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 66.

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a "hornet's nest." He cautioned CINCPAC to initiate air actions there with care. "While it is most desirable from our point of view," General Wheeler said, "to resume air operations in the excluded area and interdiction of the northeast rail line would be militarily remunerative, bridges are tough targets and the cost would be high." Noting that weather conditions had been "atrocious," he said that he saw no reason to increase the danger to air crews by sending them in during bad weather. He ended by assuring CINCPAC that there was no pressure or requirement from Washington that he send his pilots in "full bore" against the entire target system in the northeast quadrant without regard for the safety of his airmen.³⁴

On the same day it was approved, the execute order for ROLLING THUNDER 50 was sent to CINCPAC. ROLLING THUNDER 50 became effective on 1 April to continue through 30 April. Except for the changes discussed above, ROLLING THUNDER 50 resembled its predecessor.³⁵ Armed reconnaissance by US planes was authorized in NVN south and west of a line running due west from the coast at latitude 20° 32' N latitude 105° 20' E longitude, then due north to a point 30 nm from Communist China, then southwesterly to Laos but remaining 30 nm from China. The VNAF could conduct armed reconnaissance in NVN between the DMZ and 19° N. In keeping with the instructions from the Secretary of Defense, CINCPAC was told to plan for and be prepared to attack the Viet Tri Railroad/Highway Bridge, the Haiphong cement plant/TPP, the Kep EW/GCI, and seven major POL storage sites, including those at Hanoi and Haiphong.³⁶

In passing on the authorization for ROLLING THUNDER 50 to his major commanders, Admiral Sharp warned that during the "lengthy hiatus" of operations in the northeast quadrant the enemy had undoubtedly built up his air defenses to a considerable extent. For this reason, and because of the poor weather in the entire area, he cautioned commanders that he did not expect them to rush into anything simply because they had been authorized to attack in the northeast. "It will be far better to have fewer sorties flown than authorized," he said, "rather than many unremunerative

34. Ibid.

35. (23- GP 3) Msg, JCS 7480 to CINCPAC, 010112Z Apr 66.

36. Ibid.

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sorties flown simply to meet the sorties rate with attendant risks outweighing results." He was pleased with certain features of his new instructions; for example, the fact that his airmen were not expected, as in the past, to take out tough fixed targets, bridges and specified LOCs immediately and in a single strike. Authority for maximum day and night interdiction of the LOCs should not be interpreted as calling for continuous or necessarily frequent interdiction; rather it should be viewed in terms of results to be achieved.³⁷

On the same day that he received the execute order for RT 50, Admiral Sharp issued a new basic operations order to his commanders covering ROLLING THUNDER and IRON HAND operations. It was clear from the objectives listed in this order that CINCPAC had not acceded to COMUSMACV's request that operations in the area south of Vinh be given priority.³⁸

Earlier, for planning purposes, and to facilitate assignment of responsibilities to his commanders, CINCPAC had established seven geographical zones in NVN, designating these Route Packages (RPs). In this new basic operations order, CINCPAC assigned primary responsibility for armed reconnaissance, photo reconnaissance, and intelligence analysis to COMUSMACV in RP 1, to CINCPACFLT in RPs 2, 3, 4, and 6B and to CINCPACAF in RPs 5 and 6A. (See Map).

CINCPACFLT was named coordinating authority to preclude mutual interference of forces during air operations. COMUSMACV was authorized to use VNAF forces in RP 1 and charged with insuring that OPLAN 34A operations did not conflict with ROLLING THUNDER, IRON HAND, or BLUE TREE operations. He was authorized flexibility in adjusting the weight of effort between RP 1 and the STEEL TIGER and BARREL ROLL areas in Laos. CINCPACFLT would support COMUSMACV's operations in Laos by allocating any sorties in excess of his ROLLING THUNDER or IRON HAND requirements to that area, or, in the event that weather precluded strikes in NVN, by diverting sorties to Laos. Both CINCPACAF and CINCPACFLT would direct sorties into each

37. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT et al., 020255Z Apr 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 66.

38. (TS-GP 1) CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT et al., 010200Z Apr 66, JCS IN 92503.

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other's primary areas if weather conditions dictated such a move or when both commanders deemed it advisable.³⁹

Allocation of Air Effort To The "Extended Battlefield"

In early April, a shortage of air munitions resulted in the whole question of allocation of air effort in South-east Asia being brought under close scrutiny. The Secretary of Defense, during discussions with the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 12 April, expressed concern that priority of air effort might be going to ROLLING THUNDER at the expense of air operations in RVN. He stated that his statistics showed that the sorties against NVN since the initiation of RT 50 exceeded sorties against targets in RVN. He reminded the Chairman that they had repeatedly emphasized to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that first priority for the air operations must go to RVN, and that, "not until the full South Vietnamese requirements are met are they to utilize Air Force, Navy, or Marine Corps air from Thai, carrier, or South Vietnamese bases against targets in Laos and North Vietnam." In view of these explicit instructions, he assumed that the preponderance of air effort against NVN in the first ten days of April reflected a temporary reduction in General Westmoreland's needs in the South. Nevertheless, he asked General Wheeler to repeat to the field commanders that priority must be given air operations in RVN.⁴⁰

The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, immediately informed Admiral Sharp and General Westmoreland of Secretary McNamara's views. General Wheeler informed the two commanders that he had pointed out to Mr. McNamara that the air strikes in support of ground operations in RVN were actually at a high level, and that it appeared the allocation of effort was sufficient to the need. Nevertheless, because of Mr. McNamara's unusual personal interest, General Wheeler called on CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to insure that their subordinate commanders fully understood that air support in RVN had higher priority than air strikes in NVN and Laos. "Please advise me," he asked, "whether or not the ... policy is understood by all responsible commanders and is being followed in programming air operations."⁴¹

39. Ibid.

40. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 12 Apr 66, OJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 66.

41. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 8297 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 12 Apr 66.

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General Westmoreland was disturbed by the implication that he was not operating within his directives. He had, he said in an immediate reply to General Wheeler, always assumed that his superiors recognized that he, as the responsible commander in RVN, would never contemplate withholding air support from his own troops. He then turned to his earlier concept for the disruption and destruction of enemy infiltration through the "extended battlefield area," stating that he had been concentrating his air power in support of this concept. He considered the Laos/DMZ/southern NVN area nothing more than an extension of the RVN battlefield. His allocation of strike effort had been tailored to this concept. Weight of effort could not logically be divided or identified by in-country or out-of-country segments since the tactical battle was being waged in this area without regard to boundaries. He believed that what he was doing, applying in an integrated manner the resources necessary to cope with his enemy on the battlefield, was the only proper approach. ". . . I regard as unacceptable the allocation of air effort predicated on policy formula," he said. And he advocated strongly taking advantage of the flexibility of air power by shifting its weight where it was needed, when it was needed, to do the most good. Subject to these views, said COMUSMACV, all responsible commanders understood the policy and were following it in their planning and programming. If Mr. McNamara did not agree with his approach, General Westmoreland asked to be advised whether the Secretary intended that COMUSMACV's "on-the-ground judgment in these particulars be supplanted by formalized adherence to allocation of air effort by policy formula."⁴²

General Wheeler discussed General Westmoreland's message with the Secretary of Defense and they agreed that it would not be possible to give a "Yes or No" answer but rather a "Yes and No" answer to his direct question. General Wheeler informed General Westmoreland that he believed, frankly, that COMUSMACV had missed the point of Secretary McNamara's concern. The Secretary considered that ROLLING THUNDER per se definitely had second priority of demand on air resources. But he was not attempting to take away COMUSMACV's prerogatives or initiatives nor to direct allocation of air effort by policy formula.

⁴². (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 12815 to CJCS and CINCPAC, 13 Apr 66, JCS IN 22029.

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In the meantime General Wheeler had also heard from CINCPAC who stated that he and his commanders did understand the policy and were complying with it. On 14 April, addressing both CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, closed the matter for the time being by saying, ". . . I conclude that your allocations are compatible with the policy: namely, attack sorties made out-of-country with in-country resources are not at the expense of sorties required for direct support of the campaign in South Vietnam."⁴³

On the same day, the Secretary of Defense gave direct support to COMUSMACV's concept of the extended battlefield when he ordered that requirements for air operations in RVN, Laos, and RP 1 be completely filled before any strikes were made in the other Route Package areas in NVN. Just two days later, on 16 April, in a personal message to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, Secretary McNamara emphasized his order by informing both commanders that requirements in the extended battlefield area came first. Operations in other RPs might be carried out only if they did not jeopardize actions in RVN, Laos, and RP 1. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC agreed that General Westmoreland's concept was now being implemented.⁴⁴

Additional Guidance - RT 50

During April further guidance was added to the ground rules for RT 50 in the northeast quadrant. Bridges on assigned LOC segments which were JCS numbered targets were authorized for bombing whether or not they had been struck before. However, targets not associated with these LOCs and not previously bombed could not be attacked. Also, as a result of State Department objections, the railroad yards at Cam Pha, which included some port facilities and which had been struck by mistake, were specifically exempted from attack.⁴⁵

43. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8463 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 14 Apr 66.

44. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 14 Apr 66, JMF 9155.3 (12 Apr 66). (~~TS~~-GP 4) Msg, DEF 8689 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 16 Apr 66. (~~S~~) Msg, JCS 8734 to CINCPAC, 18 Apr 66. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 190323Z Apr 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 66.

45. (~~TS~~) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT et al., 290225Z Apr 66, JCS IN 52160.

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On 26 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that effective 1 May RT 50 would be continued under that designation until further notice. He was specifically warned, however, that this did not authorize him to strike the ten deferred targets. 46

On 7 June CINCPAC again set forth the policy on priority of air effort in Southeast Asia, stating that the first priority task was support of operations within RVN. CINCPACFLT would support this in-country effort with one carrier. Aircraft from two carriers and USAF planes from Thailand would be used for operations in Laos and NVN. No planes based in Thailand would be used in RVN. The VNAF would continue to participate on a "token basis" in operations carried out against RP 1 in NVN, but only if this could be done without detracting from the effort in RVN. 47

Concentration on POL Strikes - RT 50A

During the remainder of May and June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concentrated their effort and attention on convincing the President, against the advice of some of his chief policy advisors, that the ten deferred targets should be opened up for attack. On 2 May the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff briefed the President in detail on the need for attacking the POL systems, with particular emphasis on those targets in the Hanoi/Haiphong restricted circles. On the same day, in anticipation of a policy discussion luncheon at the White House scheduled for 4 May, the Chairman directed the Joint Staff to prepare a draft execute message for a new ROLLING THUNDER program to supersede RT 50. The new program would follow the general pattern of RT 50 but would include added features to increase its effectiveness. Strikes against the Haiphong and Hanoi POL complexes would be authorized, on the same day if operationally possible, but only in good weather. 48

The draft execute message was furnished to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, on 3 May. In addition to the specific

46. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9326 to CINCPAC, 26 Apr 66.

47. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV et al., 070309Z Jun 66, JCS IN 24761.

48. (TS) Memo, CJCS to Mr. Bill Moyers (White House) 4 May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66. (TS) Memo for Record, Capt J. R. McKee, USN, J-3 Pac Div, 021545 May 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 50A.

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measures and provisions which he had directed, the proposed order opened up a new route in the northeast quadrant for armed reconnaissance. It also authorized attacks on the JCS numbered targets in the northeast quadrant, including six targets previously struck in the Hanoi/Phuc Yen and Haiphong restricted areas. The limitation of 900 sorties in the northeast quadrant had been deleted in order to allow CINCPAC greater flexibility, since improving weather might make it possible for a significantly increased effort there. A total of 8,100 attack sorties was proposed for the period 5-31 May.⁴⁹

The draft message designated the revised program RT 51. At the direction of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, however, the message was recast, as a revision of the existing program, RT 50. It authorized strikes against the ten fixed targets deferred on 31 March, but warned that great care must be taken to avoid causing excessive numbers of civilian casualties. This draft was not immediately approved, however, and remained in abeyance.

On 4 May, CINCPAC proposed that strikes against the ten targets approved for planning purposes be approved for execution. In the same message CINCPAC also pointed out that of the bridge targets authorized earlier, three had been put out of commission and the fourth damaged. In addition, Admiral Sharp noted, a large number of NVN lighter and cargo craft were moving supplies from ships at anchor in the coastal port areas north of 20° 32' N latitude. He asked authority to attack them. Further, although CINCPAC had been instructed not to strike the Cam Pha area, armed reconnaissance along Route 18 near Cam Pha and Hong Gai port was authorized. He asked, therefore, for authority to strike certain facilities near Hon Gai port associated with the LOC and Route 18 armed reconnaissance. The Joint Chiefs of Staff immediately forbade him to do so, telling him that such strikes would cause "tactical difficulties." The Joint Chiefs of Staff, they informed him, were focusing on approval of strikes against NVN POL. Strikes against Hon Gai port would "complicate and obstruct this effort."⁵⁰

49. (TS) Memo, no sig, to CJCS, 3 May 66, same file, same sec.

50. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 040447Z May 66, JCS IN 57631. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1433 to CINCPAC, 9 May 66.

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National authorities hesitated to approve the bombing of the ten fixed targets mainly because these targets were near centers of population. They feared that bombing so close to Hanoi and Haiphong might cause heavy civilian casualties and raise an even greater outcry against US policy in Vietnam. This point had been made clear early in May when the Chairman had instructed the Joint Staff to include in the draft executive order specific warning against inordinate civilian casualties. Sensitivity to civilian casualties was apparent at a White House meeting on 5 May when the Secretary of State made a general statement to the effect that hospitals, schools, and temples were located very close to the POL facilities in Hanoi and Haiphong. When he investigated the accuracy of this statement, General Wheeler was informed by DIA that no such installations would be endangered by attacks on these facilities. 51

On 9 May COMUSMACV recommended that, because the VC had destroyed some textile mills in RVN, the United States retaliate by destroying the Thai Nguyen iron and steel plant, "an economic asset of appropriate importance to NVN." The Deputy Ambassador supported General Westmoreland's suggestion. But Admiral Sharp, although he agreed that retaliatory strikes should be made, recommended to the JCS that the NVN POL, beginning with the Haiphong storage, be destroyed instead. 52

Because of their desire to push through the authority for bombing the ten targets, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were adamant against any action which did not fit into their strategy for securing approval. For this reason they refused to seek approval for strikes against concentrations of enemy missiles located in storage areas near to Hanoi and Haiphong. CINCPAC assessed these concentrations to be targets of considerable value, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not believe it "expedient" to endanger their efforts on the POL, by seeking approval to hit the missiles. They so informed CINCPAC on 16 May. 53

51. (TS) Memo for Record, CJCS, "Strikes on Hanoi and Haiphong POL Facilities," 9 May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66.

52. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 091226Z May 66, JCS IN 65820. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 100730Z May 66, JCS IN 67751

53. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 052329Z May 66, JCS IN 60899; (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 062057Z May 66, JCS IN 62564; (TS) Msg, JCS 2719-66 to CINCPAC, 16 May 66; JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 50A.

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General Westmoreland put a new light on the ten targets on 22 May when he recommended that they be struck in the event of certain types of VC attacks against US installations in RVN. He arranged targets and US installations on an "eye-for-an-eye" basis, recommending that, if mortar attacks were made against US POL storages, the US should respond by bombing the Haiphong and Hanoi POL; in reply to any mortar attacks by the VC against the US airfields in the South, the US planes would bomb Kep and Phuc Yen airfields in NVN.⁵⁴

Commenting on COMUSMACV's "retaliation" proposal, General Wheeler told Admiral Sharp on 24 May that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not want targets kept in a "reserve category" for retaliatory purposes because of the inhibitions inherent in such an arrangement. He then reviewed for CINCPAC his efforts to secure Presidential approval to bomb the ten targets. He had just talked with the Secretary of Defense and proposed a reduction of the sanctuary area around Hanoi and Haiphong so that "additional targets of high worth would be opened to attack." At the same time he had asked if the current restrictions against these POL strikes were apt to continue for very long. The Secretary of Defense had observed that the single remaining obstacle to the POL attacks was the current political turmoil in RVN. He believed that as soon as this situation settled, the President would agree to bombing the POL target system.⁵⁵

CINCPAC advised General Wheeler on 27 May that he appreciated the reasons for the delay in striking the ten targets. He would live by the rules "with the express intent of not jeopardizing your efforts to get approval of these ten targets, particularly the seven POL targets." He had turned down recommendations by his field commanders to strike some relatively minor POL areas and other facilities because they were on the borderline with respect to their location near populated centers and might upset the JCS efforts. He warned,

54. (S-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 17603 to CINCPAC, 22 May 66, JCS IN 89352.

55. (TS) Msg, CJCS 2897-66 to CINCPAC, 24 May 66, OJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66. For discussion of the unsettled political conditions in RVN in this period see Ch. 38.

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however, that the enemy was dispersing his POL into smaller and smaller increments, implying that if the main areas were not struck soon their target value would dwindle.⁵⁶

Admiral Sharp then made specific recommendations, repeating previous proposals in some cases, for new ROLLING THUNDER "ground rules" to become effective 1 June. These were, in order of priority: 1) authorization to strike the ten targets, particularly the POL facilities; 2) authority to strike POL targets anywhere in the northeast quadrant; 3) authority to strike selected targets in the Hon Gai and Cam Pha complexes; 4) relaxation of rules for coastal armed reconnaissance north of 20° 32' N; 5) reduction of the Hanoi/Haiphong restricted area circles; 6) relaxation of rules to allow armed reconnaissance against other known lucrative targets in the northeast quadrant.⁵⁷

By the end of May, the arguments raised by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the field commanders appeared to be having some effect. On 31 May Secretary Rusk and Mr. Rostow concurred in the addition to RT 50 of seven LOC-associated targets, including a POL storage area less than ten miles from Haiphong. General Wheeler considered this a very encouraging sign, marred, however, by the effects of the current political troubles in the RVN. "It is quite clear that authority to attack the POL system was within our grasp," the Chairman told Admiral Sharp on 2 June, "when the political turmoil in SVN rose to a height which caused many people here to take a second look."⁵⁸

When, within the next week, the "political turmoil" subsided and the situation took a definite turn for the better, General Westmoreland sent a message to Admiral Sharp recommending immediate strikes against the ten deferred targets. He emphasized the psychological advantage of striking while Hanoi was still dismayed by the healing of the political rift in RVN.⁵⁹

56. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 270341Z May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66.

57. Ibid.

58. (TS-GP 1) Memo for Record, OASD (ISA), 31 May 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) Sec 910, RT 50A Extended. (TS) Msg, JCS 3068-66 to CINCPAC, 2 Jun 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66.

59. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV 19218 to CINCPAC, 5 Jun 66, JCS IN 22371.

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On 6 June Admiral Sharp strongly seconded Westmoreland's recommendations. Attacks now on the ten targets would encourage Saigon and enhance the RVN political situation, make enemy dispersion of POL more difficult, directly affect the movement of NVN trucks and watercraft, and have a "critical impact" on the enemy's thinking at a time when he was hoping for some seasonal successes from his operations across the borders of Laos and Cambodia.⁶⁰

General Wheeler told Admiral Sharp on the same day that, if the political situation in RVN did not worsen, he expected within a few days authority to strike the ten targets. "You should know that this first intrusion into the Hanoi/Haiphong sanctuary will raise . . . specters of large numbers of civilian casualties in the target areas." To allay the fears of those policy advisers whose judgement might be influenced by this prospect, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, had made certain that the draft execute message included admonitions on weather, crew experience, ordnance, and the like, which he normally would not send to a field commander. He assured Admiral Sharp that this had been done merely to smooth the path to authorization.⁶¹

A week later the Secretary of Defense, addressing Admiral Sharp directly, advised him that the final decision on attacking the POL, the TPP, and the cement plant would be influenced by the extent to which these targets could be bombed without killing significant numbers of civilians. He asked what preliminary steps CINCPAC recommended to keep casualties down, and how many casualties would result if such steps were taken. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had already furnished Secretary McNamara with estimates of probable casualties. They had also given him five general measures which could be taken to reduce casualties.⁶²

On 14 June Admiral Sharp cabled the Secretary that in order to minimize casualties in the attacks on the Hanoi/Haiphong storage facilities, he intended to take five steps.

60. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 060805Z Jun 66, JCS IN 23294.

61. (TS) Msg, JCS 3167-66 to CINCPAC, 6 Jun 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66.

62. (TS) Msg, OSD 3339-66 to CINCPAC, 13 Jun 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66. (TS-GP 3) Telecon 045-66, NMCC 752, J-3 to Dep C/S for Plans and Opns, PACOM, 132334Z Jun 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 66) ROLLING THUNDER 50A.

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They were: 1) conduct the strikes only in favorable weather; 2) select an axis of attack so that normal weapons dispersion would avoid populated areas; 3) use the most accurate weapons available; 4) use ECM to the maximum to thwart enemy missiles and AAA in order to limit pilot distraction during attacks; 5) use his most experienced pilots and brief them thoroughly. Under favorable weather conditions, the most important factor, CINCPAC did not expect more than 50 civilian casualties in attacking the Hanoi POL, Haiphong POL, and the Haiphong thermal power and cement plant.⁶³

General Wheeler, who was in Paris at the time, immediately cabled Secretary McNamara supporting CINCPAC's measures and estimate and saying, "I recommend that we proceed to execute as soon as possible."⁶⁴

Secretary McNamara called CINCPAC's "preliminary steps" "excellent," but he was still apparently not completely at ease. He asked Admiral Sharp on 15 June what restrictions should be placed upon flak and SAM suppression missions before and during the attacks to insure that strafing and bombing attacks on enemy AAA and missile sites did not hit populated areas. The enemy had located many such installations in the midst of civilian communities. The Secretary again warned that permission to strike the targets would depend largely on whether or not it was judged that civilian casualties in the attacks could be kept to a minimum.⁶⁵

In reply CINCPAC informed the Secretary that the restrictions already in effect were sufficient. He did not intend to go on a "SAM hunt" prior to the attack, nor to mount any massive flak suppression effort, although flak suppression in the immediate areas of the targets would be needed. He expected that most civilians would be warned in time by air raid sirens and would take cover. "It is unlikely that civilian casualties in any number would result from flak and SAM suppression," he told the Secretary.⁶⁶

63. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to SecDef, 140659Z Jun 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66.

64. (TS) Msg, CJCS to SecDef, 141548Z Jun 66, same file.

65. (TS) Msg, SecDef 3395-66 to CINCPAC, 15 Jun 66, same file.

66. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to SecDef, 160920Z Jun 66, same file.

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On 22 June the Joint Chiefs of Staff, following approval by the President, authorized CINCPAC to bomb the seven POL targets and the Kep airfield radar at first light on 24 June. CINCPAC was directed to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong POL on the same day, if possible, and then to strike the remaining targets. Attacks would have to be made under good weather conditions. Other caveats were worked into the execute message, including those measures which CINCPAC himself had devised to minimize civilian casualties. He was also told that, if weather or some other operational factor caused a delay in the strikes, he was positively not to start the bombing on Sunday, 26 June.⁶⁷

The soul searching which this decision had cost national authorities, including those at the highest level, was evident in the intense interest they displayed in every aspect of the impending operations. On the day before strikes were scheduled, CINCPAC was informed that the President and the Secretary of Defense "have been on the phone repeatedly." This concern stemmed from the expectation that a storm of criticism throughout the world would follow the bombings near Hanoi and Haiphong. "Fear of adverse reaction has been carefully implanted, nurtured, and amplified by those here who oppose more effective actions against the North," the J-3 observed to the CINCPAC J-3 on 23 June. "As you know, that group poses the greatest danger to hopes for more effective action."⁶⁸

The J-3 said that it was hard to believe the difficulty that had been encountered in securing the bombing authority. He believed that much would depend on the way in which the bombings were carried off. He cautioned field commanders that much would depend also on the manner in which the President and the Secretary of Defense were informed of what took place at each step of the way. Both wanted extremely detailed information on almost every aspect of the operations and they wanted it swiftly. The J-3 warned that special measures, special attention by special people, must be used to get this information to Washington in time and in the form desired. He asked especially to be informed about every change in the weather forecast in the target area.⁶⁹

67. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5003 to CINCPAC, 22 Jun 66.

68. (TS) NMCC Telecon 053-66, J-3 to C/S, PACOM, et al., 231745Z Jun 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 50A.

69. Ibid.

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The CINCPAC J-3 replied to the J-3 that he was taking extraordinary steps to develop the best possible reporting procedures. The weather, however, was bad, and it appeared that it would not improve within the next 48 hours, thus almost automatically precluding launching the strikes on 24 or 25 June; because 26 June was Sunday, the prospect of hitting the targets before 27 June was not very good.⁷⁰

CINCPAC recognized that in bombing near Haiphong there existed the danger of striking a ship belonging to a nation other than NVN, but he believed that it was a risk that had to be taken. He believed, for example, that a Soviet tanker was currently in Haiphong and assumed that this vessel was anchored off the pier at the main POL facility discharging its cargo. CINCPAC told his air commanders that, even though a tanker was berthed off the end of the servicing pier; their planes could bomb the POL storage area. If, however, the tanker was anchored and off-loading its cargo, no attacks would be made on the servicing pier.⁷¹

Before CINCPAC could launch the strikes, sensational stories appeared in the world press predicting air strikes against the Hanoi and Haiphong POL storages. These accounts gave the sequence of strikes, and the reasons for them, making accurate guesses as to timing, and speculating that the delay in bombing had been caused solely by bad weather. On 25 June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, considering that the entire operation had been "thoroughly blown," and that NVN would have already increased the quantity and alertness of its air defenses to meet the attacks, cancelled CINCPAC's authority to bomb the POL. General Wheeler explained the reasons for cancellation to Admiral Sharp, and added that since the weather forecast was bad for the next six or seven days, not much was lost. He was convinced, said the Chairman, that once the weather cleared and CINCPAC was ready to go, the Joint Chiefs of Staff could obtain immediate approval for execution of the POL strikes. He asked CINCPAC to keep

70. (TS) NMCC Telecon 033-66, C/S, PACOM to J-3, 232229Z Jun 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) ROLLING THUNDER 50A.

71. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to CINCPACFLT, 232130Z, 26 Jun 66, JCS IN 52911.

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a close weather watch, to keep his strike forces at the ready, and to speak up when he was ready to go. As an alternative to the POL strikes, General Wheeler requested him to strike the rail and highway bridge at Viet Tri on the Hanoi-Cao line. He warned Admiral Sharp that there was much concern in Washington that the enemy would have stepped up his air defense in the Hanoi/Haiphong target area. He also warned of the possibility "that they will attempt to turn these strikes into an aerial Dien Bien Phu perhaps to the point of sacrificing their MIGs in a full-blown air battle and launching their IL-28s against the fleet or against Da Nang."72

On 28 June, CINCPAC, following instructions, cabled "Forces are ready and weather forecast favorable for strikes against NVN POL system. Request authority to initiate strikes . . . Wednesday after 291100H Saigon time."73

Almost immediately General Wheeler cabled Admiral Sharp full authorization to launch the bombing attacks on the POL.74 The attacks took place as scheduled on 29 June. Because only about 40 percent of the storage capacity at Haiphong was destroyed in the first strike, CINCPAC was authorized to restrike on 5 July.75

72. (TS) Msg, JCS 3633-66 to CINCPAC, 25 Jun 66, OCSJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66. (TS) Msg, JCS 5311 to CINCPAC, 25 Jun 66.

73. (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 281019Z Jun 66, JCS IN 59442.

74. (TS) Msg, JCS 5414 to CINCPAC, 28 Jun 66.

75. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5945 to CINCPAC, 5 Jul 66.

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Chapter 32

DEPLOYMENTS AND FORCES--1966

In 1965 US troop strength in RVN had risen from a little over 20,000 to approximately 184,000. In 1966 this figure would more than double. The expansion of these forces was the direct result of requests from COMUSMACV to meet a growing enemy threat.

1966 Force Requirements

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had begun consideration of 1966 force requirements for Vietnam in mid-1965 and had submitted a program, Phase II forces, to the Secretary of Defense on 10 November 1965. When Secretary McNamara visited Saigon in late November 1965, General Westmoreland had informed him that NVA strength in RVN was increasing, and had requested that additional forces be deployed to RVN in 1966.¹

Following these discussions, COMUSMACV and CINCPAC prepared detailed requirements for the additional forces needed in 1966, designating these additions Phase IIA forces. CINCPAC submitted the Phase IIA requirements to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 16 December 1965. The Phase IIA forces were integrated into a deployment priority list of all forces required by quarter. CINCPAC called for a total of 42 maneuver battalions and about 221,000 US troops to be moved to RVN during 1966. Major units involved included three Army divisions (25th, 4th, and a third, not designated), a separate Army infantry brigade, an armored cavalry regiment, the remainder of the 1st Marine Division, a Marine RLT, and ten tactical fighter squadrons. CINCPAC also included additional ground air defense weapons for employment at the more vulnerable US bases in RVN (11 more HAWK battalions, 13 more M-42 battalions, and 16 M-55 Quad 50 batteries). Since the deployment of the 25th Infantry Division and the Marine units would deplete his reserves, CINCPAC included in his requirements the reconstitution of the Marine Amphibious Brigade on Okinawa and an infantry division in Hawaii. He also requested 45,000 additional allied troops,

1. For Phase I deployment consideration, see Ch. 22

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which would bring the total strength of allied forces in RVN to approximately 66,000 by the end of 1966.²

To meet CINCPAC's requirements, the Joint Chiefs of Staff convened a planning conference to work out troop lists and deployment schedules. This conference met in Honolulu from 17 January through 6 February 1966 and produced three alternative capabilities programs for the deployment of forces to PACOM in CY 1966. The three alternatives, Cases I, II, and III, were based on the requirements submitted by CINCPAC on 16 December, but modified and validated during the conference. Each case was based on a different combination of sources for the forces and provided varying levels and mixes of forces in differing time frames within CY 1966. The conference determined that the Service capabilities that could most nearly meet the requirements were those set forth in Case I. This Case provided for an increase of about 202,000 US personnel (including 43 maneuver battalions) and 24,000 allied personnel (13 maneuver battalions) in CY 1966. Case I also included 99,000 additional men for PACOM areas outside of South Vietnam. The forces would be drawn from the CONUS current force structure, activations, feasible drawdown from overseas areas, call-up of selected Reserve units and individuals, and extensions of terms of service.³

At a meeting on 9 February with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Service Secretaries, and other DOD officials, the Secretary of Defense summarized the results of the recent Honolulu planning conference and instructed those present "to assume and act to deploy" combat units as provided in Case I, but with the understanding that there would be no Reserve call-up. On 17 February, the Secretary of Defense formally directed the Military Departments and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to assume that Case I was

2. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, Ser 000473, "Reprogrammed Phased Force Requirements for FY 1966," 16 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65) sec 1A.

3. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, Ser 00055, 12 Feb 66, Encl to JCS 2343/769-2, 16 Feb 66, JMF 9155.3 (11 Jan 66). (~~TS~~) Hq, CINCPAC, "CY 66 Capabilities Programs," vol I, same file, sec 1B. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCS 2343/772, 18 Feb 66, JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66).

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the requirement "we will try to meet" and to study all possible ways of meeting it short of calling Reserves or extending terms of service.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not object, at this time, to the Secretary's decision on a Reserve call-up, and on 18 February, they directed the Services to provide the forces for deployment on the timetable requested "or on the earliest practicable dates thereafter."⁴

After further study of the Case I requirements and schedules, the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded that, without a selective Reserve call-up, these requirements could not be met in full. To do so, they explained to the Secretary of Defense on 1 March, would place combat elements out of balance with support capabilities and would cause "an extremely harmful effect" on EUCOM and LANTCOM capabilities. The Joint Chiefs of Staff estimated that the adoption of Case I requirements would cause drawdowns in EUCOM of 48,800 Army personnel (21 battalion equivalents), four tactical reconnaissance and six TFSSs, and a Marine BLT with associated amphibious assault shipping; in LANTCOM of 6,500 personnel, resulting in 38 combat ships reduced to one-third manning level; and in PACOM of one tactical reconnaissance and five TFSSs. They warned that such severe drawdowns would necessitate even greater reliance on "very early employment" of nuclear weapons if war should occur in Europe. The risks to US military posture inherent in the extensive drawdown that would be required, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, were not justified by the earlier deployment schedules that would be achieved. They recommended against Case I deployments.

Instead, they proposed to the Secretary of Defense "stretched out" deployment schedules that would provide the same forces, but over a 16-month period rather than the ten months remaining in CY 1966. Even these stretched-out deployments posed some risk to US military posture worldwide, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff considered it "a more acceptable risk" than that inherent in Case I. To permit the earliest possible restoration of US military posture, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested the necessary program changes and budgetary action for the activation of: two Army divisions; assorted Navy units, ships, and personnel;

4. (TS-GP 3) SM-170-66 to CSA, et al., 18 Feb 66 (derived from JCS 2343/772), JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66). (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/772, 18 Feb 66; (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., 17 Feb 65, Encl to JCS 2343/760-1, 18 Feb 66; JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66).

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Air Force units including fifteen TFSSs, six tactical reconnaissance squadrons, one tactical combat squadron, and four tactical air support squadrons; and one Marine attack squadron and additional personnel for Marine combat and combat support units. The Joint Chiefs of Staff considered that either alternative held serious logistic problems, but those arising from stretched-out deployments would be less severe than those inherent in Case I.⁵

Despite the JCS recommendation, the Secretary of Defense on 10 March authorized Case I figures "as the revised approved deployment plan for South Vietnam," stating that "all necessary actions are to be taken to meet these deployment dates without call-up of reserves, or extensions of terms of service (except for the Marine Corps and Navy)." The figure as finally approved by the Secretary of Defense provided for a US strength of 283,500 in RVN by June 1966, with this figure rising to 415,000 by December 1966 and to 425,600 by June 1967. US maneuver battalions in RVN would rise to 52 in June 1966 and reach a total of 79 by the end of the year, while combat support battalions for the same periods would total 38 and 66, respectively. US attack-capable aircraft would increase from the 711 in RVN in December 1965 to 866 by mid-1966 and to 1,087 by the end of 1966.⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, still not convinced that the Case I schedules could be met within existing capabilities, re-examined the current estimates of the Service capabilities to meet the force requirements. On 4 April they forwarded to the Secretary of Defense an integrated deployment program that met "as closely as feasible" the Case I program prescribed by the Secretary of Defense in early March. The JCS plan reflected a projected strength by the end of CY 1966 of 376,350 (70 maneuver battalions) as compared to the Case I strength of 413,557 (79 maneuver battalions)--a drawdown of approximately 37,000. (In late April, the Joint Chiefs of Staff revised this drawdown figure to 47,731.)⁷

5. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-130-66 to SecDef, 1 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2343/760-5), same file, sec 3. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-156-66 to SecDef, 11 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2343/760-9), same file, sec 4.

6. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., "Deployments to Southeast Asia (U)," 10 Mar 66, Encl to JCS 2343/760-12, 11 Mar 66, same file, sec 5.

7. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-218-66 to SecDef, 4 Apr 66 (derived from JCS 2343/760-17), same file, sec 6. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-274-66 to SecDef, 28 Apr 66 (derived from JCS 2343/760-38), same file, sec 9.

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On 11 April 1966, Secretary McNamara approved, with minor modifications, the 4 April JCS plan. The exceptions dealt with the scheduling in the earlier months of 1966, but did not change the year-end figures. The Secretary's decision ended a four-month effort to resolve 1966 force requirements for Vietnam and provided for a doubling of US forces in South Vietnam by the end of the year. The movement of individual units in the approved program continued to require the specific approval of the Secretary of Defense.⁸

While force requirement figures were being determined during the period January through April 1966, actual deployment of major combat units to South Vietnam continued. In the last days of December 1965, the airlift of the 3d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division began; the 2d Brigade arrived by ship in February; and the 1st Brigade closed on 29 April, bringing the total US strength in South Vietnam by early May to 255,574. In May and June 1966, US deployments proceeded ahead of schedule, and by late June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were planning the deployment of an additional nine maneuver battalions (three previously scheduled for the Dominican Republic and six from the newly-activated 9th US Army Infantry Division) to South Vietnam in the latter half of 1966. This would provide 79 US maneuver battalions in RVN by the end of CY 1966, as had been requested by CINCPAC and specified in the Case I figures. To reflect this acceleration, the Secretary of Defense on 2 July 1966 issued a revised deployment plan, Southeast Asia Deployment Plan #3.⁹ It called for 391,000 US troops in SVN by the end of 1966. By June 1967, three additional maneuver battalions would be added (for a total of 82) and US strength would increase to 431,000. (During the next four months, the Secretary

8. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., 11 Apr 66, Encl to JCS 2343/760-13, 13 Apr 66, same file, sec 8. For SecDef approval of movement of individual units see JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66) secs 9-19.

9. The reason for this plan being designated Program #3 is not explained. None of the earlier programs were designated Southeast Asia Deployment Plan #1 or #2.

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of Defense approved a number of revisions to Program #3, raising the projected US strength in RVN to 392,000 by the end of 1966 and to 434,000 by June 1967, but leaving the number of maneuver battalions unchanged.)¹⁰

Just five days before the Secretary of Defense issued Program #3, the President had asked if any acceleration of deployments to Vietnam was possible. He wanted General Westmoreland to feel assured that he would have all the men he needed as soon as possible. The President requested the Secretary of Defense to meet with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and provide him an indication of what acceleration was possible for the remainder of the year.¹¹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff doubted that any further accelerations of "supportable combat-ready" forces beyond those currently scheduled could be attained, and on 15 July, the Secretary of Defense informed the President that "strenuous efforts" had already been made to accelerate deployments. He added that this effort had succeeded and that the United States would be able to provide more troops and equipment during the remainder of 1966 than had been thought possible in the spring. To illustrate the degree of acceleration already achieved, the Secretary of Defense informed the President of the plan to have 79 maneuver battalions in RVN by December 1966, as compared to the 70 battalions planned in April.¹²

10. (~~TS~~-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966; pp. 69-70. (~~TS~~-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 108-66 (Supp.), 9 May 66, p. 33. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to SecA, et al., 2 Jul 66, Encl to JCS 2343/760-74, 6 Jul 66, JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66) sec 12. (~~TS~~-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, et al., 15 Jul 66, Encl to JCS 2343/760-77, 18 Jul 66, same file, sec 13. (~~TS~~-GP 4) Memos; ASD(SA) to CJCS, et al., 1 Aug 66, 18 Aug 66, 6 Oct 66, and 28 Oct 66, Encls to JCS 2343/760-85, -91, -101, -102, 3 Aug, 23 Aug, 10 Oct, and 1 Nov 66, same file, secs 14, 16, and 18.
11. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, Pres to SecDef, 28 Jun 66, Encl to JCS 2343/858, 28 Jun 66, JMF 9155.3 (28 Jun 66).
12. (~~TS~~-GP 4) JCSM-540-66 to SecDef, 8 Jul 66 (derived from JCS 2343/858-1); (~~TS~~-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to Pres, 15 Jul 66, Encl to JCS 2343/858-2, 18 Jul 66; JMF 9155.3 (28 Jun 66).

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NVN Force Increases

In the early months of 1966 NVN, too, was obviously building up its forces in RVN. By late April, NVN strength in South Vietnam had increased substantially. The Secretary of Defense estimated that there were eleven or more NVN regiments in SVN. In late June Secretary McNamara, in a public effort to justify US air strikes on oil depots in Hanoi and Haiphong, explained that North Vietnam had increased the infiltration of personnel into RVN by 120 percent and supplies by 150 percent during the past year. He believed NVN units in the South had increased by 100 percent.¹³

Adjusted 1966 and 1967 Requirements

Clearly, US forces, in addition to those scheduled in April, would be required. COMUSMACV and CINCPAC had already been considering a revision of force requirements, and on 18 June CINCPAC had submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff his adjusted CY 1966 and CY 1967 requirements. The adjusted CY 1966 requirements called for approximately 475,000 US personnel in RVN by the end of 1966, an increase of over 100,000 from the 376,350 figure approved by the Secretary of Defense in April. This would provide 79 maneuver battalions, 74 combat support battalions, 84 helicopter companies/squadrons, and 34 tactical air squadrons. The adjusted 1966 requirements also called for about 46,000 allied troops, including 23 maneuver battalions, to be in South Vietnam by the end of 1966.

CINCPAC asked for 84,000 additional troops during CY 1967. This increase would enable the United States to field a force of approximately 543,000, including 90 maneuver battalions, 89 combat support battalions, 88 helicopter companies/squadrons, and 39 tactical air squadrons. Allied strength would be raised to 59,000 (30 maneuver battalions). CINCPAC's requirements outside of Vietnam were 148,000 by the end of 1966, and an increase of 24,000 during 1967.¹⁴

CINCPAC explained that these requirements stemmed entirely from the threat posed by the continuing and increasing

13. NY Times, 21 Apr 66, 18; 30 Jun 66, 15.

14. (TS-GP 3) Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS, Ser 000255, 18 Jun 66, Encl to JCS 2343/855, 24 Jun 66, JMF 9155.3 (18 Jun 66). Hq, CINCPAC, "CY 66 Adjusted Requirements and CY 67 Force Requirements," vols I and II, same file, secs 1A and 1B.

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NVN support of the war in South Vietnam. He pointed out that, although the air campaign against the North had made enemy infiltration into RVN more difficult, it had not "sufficiently" reduced his infiltration capability. CINCPAC stated that the enemy had built up his stockpiles in both NVN and RVN and was now capable of fielding and supporting more maneuver battalions in the South than ever before. In addition, said CINCPAC, more ground forces than those set forth in his current submission would probably be required if the enemy capability to field and support combat units in SVN was not sufficiently reduced.¹⁵

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reviewed the adjusted 1966 and 1967 requirements and, on 5 August, forwarded them to the Secretary of Defense for information. In brief, the Joint Chiefs of Staff found CINCPAC's requirements valid for force planning and budgeting purposes, representing "a logical and progressive build-up necessary to the attainment of US military objectives." The Joint Chiefs of Staff told Secretary McNamara that they and the Services were determining capabilities to meet these added requirements, in addition to sustaining the forces already in RVN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had scheduled a capabilities planning conference for October to correlate these requirements into a comprehensive program which they hoped to present to the Secretary of Defense in late October or early November.¹⁶

Secretary McNamara replied on the same day. He recognized "our policy" of furnishing the troops, weapons, and supplies requested by General Westmoreland at the times he desired them, and he promised to accord these latest requirements the same consideration. Nevertheless, he desired a detailed analysis of the requirements to determine that each was essential to the war. He cautioned that:

we must send to Vietnam what is needed, but only what is needed. Excessive deployments weaken our ability to win by undermining the economic structure of the RVN and by raising doubts concerning the soundness of our planning.¹⁷

15. Ibid.

16. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-506-66 to SecDef, 5 Aug 66 (derived from JCS 2343/855-1), JMF 9155.3 (18 Jun 66).

17. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "CINCPAC CY 1966 Adjusted Requirements and CY 1967 Requirements (U)," 5 Aug 66, Encl to JCS 2343/855-4, 8 Aug 66, same file.

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CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, COMUSMACTHAI, and representatives of the Joint Staff and the Services met in Honolulu from 5 through 14 October to validate PACOM force requirements. This conference produced an updated intelligence estimate, a concept for the employment of forces, a Southeast Asia air program, and a comprehensive force deployment program. The intelligence estimate set forth the enemy threat from which the concept of operations was derived. Together they were the basis for the force requirements.¹⁸

After reviewing the conference report, the Joint Chiefs of Staff developed a refined force deployment program for South Vietnam for CY 1966/1967. They submitted this program to the Secretary of Defense on 4 November, stating that it met CINCPAC requirements as closely as feasible. The program did not meet all of CINCPAC's desired closure dates and omitted certain requirements altogether (six infantry battalions for I CTZ, three helicopter squadrons, two artillery battalion equivalents, a sixth CVA, 12 destroyers, three tactical fighter squadrons, and certain combat support units). Although the program was less than CINCPAC desired, the Joint Chiefs considered it adequate for the effective execution of the concept of operations developed at the Honolulu conference.¹⁹

Specifically, the JCS 4 November program provided for the buildup of US forces in RVN to reach 382,756 by the end of 1966--8,000 less than the figure approved by the Secretary of Defense in July, and nearly 90,000 less than that called for by CINCPAC in his 18 June requirements. The 382,756 figure included 82 maneuver battalions, 49 field artillery battalions, 51 helicopter companies/squadrons, and 32 tactical squadrons. Third country strength would be raised to 51,000, comprising 23 maneuver battalions. By the end of 1967, the JCS program projected US deployment in RVN at 497,168. This strength would make it possible to raise the number of maneuver battalions to 94, field artillery battalions to 66, helicopter companies/squadrons to 77, and tactical squadrons to 34. The increase in forces was expected to generate an expenditure of 46.21 billion piasters in CY 1967. The Joint Chiefs of Staff contemplated no further buildup of third country strength in 1967 or beyond, but they estimated that US deployment in RVN would reach approximately 524,000 troops, with the number of maneuver battalions remaining at 94, by the end of 1968. For PACOM

18. (TS) Hq, CINCPAC, "CY 66/67 Requirements/Capabilities Programs," vol I, same file, sec 6A.

19. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-702-66 to SecDef, 4 Nov 66 (derived from JCS 2343/855-25), same file, sec 8.

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areas other than RVN, the JCS program provided for 157,847 troops by the end of 1966, 201,140 by the end of 1967, and 206,429 by the end of 1968.²⁰

Program #4

After reviewing the JCS submission, the Secretary of Defense decided that a deployment plan of the magnitude proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff would further exacerbate the already serious inflationary trend in RVN. He told the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 11 November that a "reasonably stable" SVN economy was essential to unite the population behind the Government and to conduct military operations successfully. It was necessary, therefore, to fit US deployments to the capacity of the RVN economy to bear them without undue inflation. Ambassador Lodge had already asked that US military spending in RVN be held to a 42-billion piaster level in 1967. Consequently, the Secretary of Defense found the JCS 46-billion piaster program self-defeating, and he had approved a plan, "Southeast Asia Deployment Program #4," that appeared the maximum consistent with any reasonable hope of achieving economic stability. Program #4 called for a total of 463,300 US personnel in RVN by the end of 1967, as contrasted with the JCS recommendation of 497,168, 87 maneuver battalions as opposed to 94 recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and 62 artillery battalions, as compared to the JCS recommendation of 66. Program #4 projected US strength in SVN by June 1968 at 469,300, but did not go beyond that date. (On 16 December 1966, Secretary McNamara revised Program #4, resulting in a reduction of the planned US strength in RVN at the end of 1967 from 463,300 to 460,000 and by June 1968 from 469,300 to 467,000; there was no change in the projected number of maneuver battalions.) Mr. McNamara invited the Joint Chiefs of Staff to suggest changes in unit mix, if he had deleted units that had a higher priority than those he had approved.²¹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were not satisfied with Program #4. They informed the Secretary of Defense on 2 December that, while the restoration of economic stability in SVN was important, the achievement of such stability would depend primarily on the capabilities of military and paramilitary forces to defeat

20. Ibid.

21. (SS-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Deployments to Southeast Asia (U)," 11 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/855-27, 15 Nov 66, same file, sec 9.

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the enemy, provide the secure environment necessary for political, economic, and social development and, concurrently, provide the essential impetus to the Revolutionary Development Program. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the imposition of Program #4 would reduce the military capability to execute military tasks in RVN and to achieve US national objectives. They added that the rate at which US forces could undertake area control, open land LOCs, and provide the security essential for Revolutionary Development and other associated programs would be slower under Program #4 than with the forces requested in their 4 November program. They thought that as a consequence of the Program #4 reductions, the intensity and frequency of combat operations might be restricted, resulting in a longer war at increasing costs in casualties and materiel.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reaffirmed their support for the 4 November program, but in the absence of approval of their program, they recommended to the Secretary of Defense certain modifications to Program #4. These modifications made no changes in approved deployment figures, but did make substantial changes in unit mix in order to create a better balanced force.²² Secretary McNamara accepted these modifications, with the exception of certain new Army units totalling 2,803 spaces. Thus 1967 deployment figures were at last fixed.²³

During the second half of 1966, actual deployment of US combat units had continued. Operation ROBIN, the deployment of the 4th Infantry Division, began on 21 July with the arrival of advance parties of the 2d Brigade at Pleiku. The remainder of the Division closed in the following three months with the last units of the 3d Brigade arriving at Dau Tieng on 18 October. As 1966 ended, the 9th Infantry Division was closing, and plans had been made to station elements of the Division in IV CTZ. At the end of December US strength in South Vietnam stood at approximately 383,278, more than doubling the 184,000 US troops that had been there at the beginning of the year, and another 80,000 had been approved for deployment in 1967. By the end of 1967 the United States would have nearly a half a million men in Vietnam.²⁴

Enemy forces had also increased in 1966. The Secretary of Defense estimated enemy forces in South Vietnam at 275,000

22. (~~TS~~-GP 4) JCSM-739-66 to SecDef, 2 Dec 66 (derived from JCS 2343/885-29), same file, sec 10.

23. (~~TS~~-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Deployments to SEA and Other PACOM Areas (U)," 9 Dec 66, Encl to JCS 2343/855-31, 12 Dec 66, same file, sec 10.

24. (~~TS~~-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 75, 82. (~~TS~~-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 1-67 (Supp.), 3 Jan 67, p. 35.

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at the close of 1966, a gain of nearly 25,000 since the beginning of the year. The 275,000 figure included 54,000 NVN regulars--more than double the 26,000 in SVN in late December 1965--62,000 main force VC troops, 11,000 local and district VC guerrillas, and 58,000 political and administrative cadres and support troops, such as supply, medical, and communications personnel. Secretary McNamara found one bright spot in this picture: enemy strength during the second half of 1966 had remained at a level of about 275,000.²⁵

On his part General Westmoreland was optimistic. While visiting the United States in late December, he stated in a television interview that "the tide had turned in our favor during the year 1966." But he was quick to caution that the length of the war must be measured in years and that "more troops will be needed from our country and, hopefully, from free world allies."²⁶

THIRD COUNTRY FORCES, 1966

During 1966, third country strength in RVN increased from 22,404 to 52,602. This 30,000-man increase included a ROK division and a ROK regiment with supporting elements, a two-battalion Australian task force, and a 2,000-man Filipino civic action group.²⁷

In early 1966, the Joint Chiefs of Staff undertook a review of third country participation in RVN in order to analyze the third country support already provided and to determine what additional assistance would be useful. The study, noted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 1 July, found that, with the exception of certain Free World nations in the Pacific, efforts to procure military assistance for RVN had not yet yielded significant results. The study termed the Free World military assistance that had already been contributed "highly effective and of material assistance" to the effort in RVN. Shortfalls in US force capabilities could be met in part through increased Free World Military Assistance Forces (FWMAF) contributions, particularly in the areas of transportation, construction, maintenance, and medicine. The study cautioned, however, that such FWMAF contributions would only supplement, and not substitute

25. NY Times, 26 Jan 67, 2.

26. Ibid, 27 Dec 66, 3.

27. (SS-NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 1-67 (Supp.), 3 Jan 67, p. 35.

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for, the approved US deployments. The study listed, by country, the Free World forces that might be available for use in Vietnam. In addition to forces from the ROK, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines, the study also listed several Western European countries (Greece, The Netherlands, Italy, and Spain), Turkey, India, South Africa, Jordan, Israel, Iran, and a number of Latin American nations. The study did not recommend any specific courses of action, and after noting the study, the Joint Chiefs of Staff merely returned it to the Joint Staff "for use as a reference."²⁸

Republic of Korea

While the Joint Chiefs of Staff were analyzing the broad question of Free World assistance to RVN, actual deployments of third country forces had moved ahead. The third country that contributed the largest number of troops in 1966, as had been the case in 1965, was the Republic of Korea.

CINCPAC's CY 1966 force requirements, submitted in December 1965, had contained provision for an additional ROK division and regiment. On 8 January 1966, the Secretary of State instructed the US Ambassador in Seoul to begin negotiations for these ROK forces. President Park agreed on 29 January to supply the requested forces, contingent upon approval by the ROK National Assembly, and in return the United States promised to equip this force and finance all its additional costs. As ultimately worked out between the ROK and the United States, the force augmentation included the desired infantry division and regiment, along with assorted logistic, medical, and other support-type units, for a total of 23,488 men. Added to the forces already in country, the new augmentation would raise the total ROK strength in South Vietnam to approximately 45,600.²⁹

The ROK announced the planned increase of its forces in RVN on 28 February, and the deployment began on 29 April. The United States and the ROK made no formal arrangement covering the operational control of the ROK force in RVN, but, like the

28. (S-GP 3) SM-258-66 to Dir, J-5, 22 Mar-66; (S-GP 4) JCS 2343/764-2, 24 Jun 66; JMF 9155.3 (3 Feb 66).

29. (TS) Hq, CINCPAC, "Reprogrammed Phased Force Requirements for CY 1966," 16 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65) sec 1A. (TS NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 86-88. (TS NOFORN-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 1-67 (Supp.), 3 Jan 67, p. 35.

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ROK force deployed to RVN in 1965, the ROK troops deployed in 1966 came under the de facto control of COMUSMACV.³⁰

In May COMUSMACV, in the preparation of his CY 1967 force requirements, called for the provision of a ROK marine division, but COMUSKOREA expressed serious reservations about the feasibility of this proposal. He believed that such a request prior to the ROK presidential election scheduled for early 1967 might result in adverse consequences for President Park and his political party. COMUSKOREA also doubted that the ROK could supply additional marine forces without an extensive expansion of the ROK Marine Corps base structure. Consequently, no further action was taken on this matter in 1966.³¹

Australia

Late in 1965, and again early in 1966, the United States raised with Australia the possibility of increasing its troop commitment in RVN. Despite some initial reluctance, Australia agreed in early March to augment its force. The augmentation would consist of a two-battalion task force, totalling about 4,500 personnel.³²

In light of the pending troop increase, the United States and Australia negotiated a new Military Working Arrangement, replacing the 5 May 1965 Arrangement. The new Arrangement, signed on 17 March 1966, was similar to the previous one. It vested command of the Australian forces in the Commander, Australian Force, Vietnam (COMAFV), and it maintained the operational control of COMUSMACV over the Australian commander. A Logistical and Administrative Supplement and a Financial Working Arrangement continued provision for MACV logistic and administrative support for the Australian forces and for Australian reimbursement for this support.³³

30. (U) ROK Government Statement on its Decision to Dispatch Additional Forces to the RVN, 28 Feb 66; (C) Msg, JCS 6292-66 to MACV, 14 Oct 66; OCJCS Bulky File 091 Vietnam Oct 66.

31. (~~TS~~ ~~NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 89-90.

32. Ibid., pp. 92-93. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 060130Z Mar 66, JCS IN 45703.

33. (~~C~~ ~~NOFORN~~ except Australia) Military Working Arrangement between Chief of the General Staff, Australian Army, and COMUSMACV, 17 Mar 66; (~~C~~ ~~NOFORN~~ except Australia) Logistical and Administrative Supplement to Military Working Arrangement between Australia and United States, 17 Mar 66; (~~C~~ ~~NOFORN~~ except Australia) -- Financial Working Arrangement between USMACV and AFV, 26 Mar 66; JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 65).

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The advance party of the Australian Task Force (ATF) arrived in RVN during April, and the main body followed in several increments with the deployment being completed by 5 June 1966. COMUSMACV deployed the ATF to Ba Ria, placing it under the control of CG II FFORCEV. Australia requested and received US assurances that its forces would not be used in operations near the Cambodian border since Australia had diplomatic relations with Cambodia. With the arrival of the ATF in RVN, the 1st Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, which had been in Vietnam since mid-1965, returned home.³⁴

In August the United States considered approaching Australia for another commitment of forces for Vietnam. COMAFV advised COMUSMACV, however, that the Australian Government, although aware of the need for additional forces for the ATF, did not wish to raise the matter of further troops for Vietnam until after the Australian elections in November. COMAFV gave the impression that Australia would make a troop increase after the election, and this impression proved correct. On 22 December 1966, Prime Minister Holt announced that Australia would send a squadron of light bombers (B-57 Canberras), a new guided missile destroyer, and 900 more army personnel to RVN. This would raise the Australian strength to about 6,300, but these additional forces did not arrive in Vietnam until the Spring of 1967.³⁵

New Zealand

In early 1966 the United States sounded out New Zealand with regard to the possible deployment of an infantry battalion to South Vietnam. New Zealand, like Australia, faced an election in 1966, and although sympathetic to the US approach, the Government preferred not to introduce the question of further combat troops for Vietnam into the election year debate. At this time, although New Zealand was unwilling to supply the infantry battalion, it did bring its artillery battery (sent to Vietnam in 1965) up to strength by the addition of two 105mm

34. ~~(TS-NOFORN-GP 1)~~ COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 93.

35. Ibid., p. 94. (S-GP 1) DIA IB 250-66, 28 Dec 66, p. A-8. ~~(TS-NOFORN-GP 1)~~ COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, pp. 248-250.

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howitzers and 27 men. It also augmented its medical team at Qui Nhon with six additional men, raising the total New Zealand strength in Vietnam to 155.³⁶

The Philippines

The Philippines contributed a 2,000-man civic action group to the Vietnam effort in 1966. The United States had suggested this move in 1965 and the Philippine Government had agreed, but the Philippine Congress had refused to approve this action. In early 1966, President Marcos again requested his Congress for authorization to send the group. To assist in the passage of the measure, "judicious use" of US MAP aid was applied in areas suggested by Marcos, including the delivery of four Swift Boats for antismuggling operations, M-14 rifles and machine guns for a constabulary battalion combat team, and equipment for three engineer battalions. The Philippine Congress passed the bill on 5 June 1966, and the Philippine Civic Action Group (PHILCAGV) began arriving in South Vietnam on 16 August.³⁷

The PHILCAGV consisted of engineer construction, medical, and rural community development units/teams with the necessary security support units. On 20 July 1966, the United States and the Philippines signed a Military Working Arrangement placing all elements and personnel of the PHILCAGV under the command of the Philippines military commander (COMPHILCAGV). The Arrangement did not place COMPHILCAGV under the operational control of COMUSMACV, but it did provide for a Free World Military Assistance Policy Council (FWMAPC) consisting of the Chief, Joint General Staff, RVNAF, COMPHILCAGV, and COMUSMACV, or their representatives, to "develop and prescribe the general concept of employment of PHILCAGV units" The United

36. ~~(TS NOFORN GP 1)~~ COMUSMACV Command History, 1966,
pp. 94-95.

37. ~~(TS NOFORN GP 1)~~ COMUSMACV Command History, 1966,
pp. 95-97.

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States agreed that USMACV would provide all support for the Philippine force, specifically stating that this support was not reimbursable by the Philippine Government.³⁸

Republic of China

The question of the use of Nationalist Chinese combat troops in South Vietnam arose again in 1966. In April the Commandant of the Marine Corps told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that objections to the employment of Chinese Nationalist forces in RVN normally had as their basis the "historical, traditional antipathies of the Vietnamese people for the Chinese." However, said the Commandant, Marine Corps, he had witnessed enthusiastic exchanges between prominent Vietnamese and Chinese leaders for CHINAT participation in Vietnam. The Commandant believed that by "isolating the purely military consequences," great benefit could be derived from participation of the well-trained and -equipped Nationalist Chinese forces. He also stated that the "long accepted hypothesis" of Vietnamese antagonism toward such a proposal was not borne out by his observations. Consequently, he recommended that the Joint Chiefs of Staff request the preparation of a Special National Intelligence Estimate to consider both South Vietnamese and Communist Chinese reaction to the introduction of Nationalist Chinese combat troops in RVN.³⁹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff did request the special estimate and the resulting SNIE found that there would be little popular support in South Vietnam for Nationalist Chinese participation. The SNIE added that the RVN military leaders, although concerned "to some degree" about popular reaction, would probably agree to the deployment of Chinese troops. The Estimate predicted that the Chinese Communists would interpret a GRC deployment to RVN as a significant change in US policy with potentially serious implications. It listed the following possible CHICOM reactions: increased pressure and

38. (C-NOFORN except Republic of the Philippines-GP 4) Military Working Arrangement Between the Chief of Staff, Armed Forces of the Philippines and COMUSMACV, 20 Jul 66; Financial Working Arrangement Between COMUSMACV and the Chief of Staff, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 21 Nov 66; JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 65) sec 2.

39. (TS-GP 1) CMC-34-66, 18 Apr 66, Encl to JCS 2343/814, 20 Apr 66, JMF 9155.3 (18 Apr 66).

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harassment of Taiwan; reinforcement of CHICOM forces along the North Vietnamese and Laotian borders; public acknowledgment and reinforcement of CHICOM military forces in North Vietnam; and increased CHICOM pressure on Hanoi to resist any negotiation and to hold out for total victory. It was doubtful that Communist China would move "volunteers" into South Vietnam, but Free World reaction would be one of alarm over the increased chance of a US-CHICOM war.⁴⁰

The pessimistic prognostication of the SNIE did not dissuade the Commandant of the Marine Corps. On 31 May, he informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that, in full recognition of the military, political, and economic factors involved, he deemed it both appropriate and desirable to secure Nationalist Chinese combat forces for use in South Vietnam. He proposed that the United States request the Government of the Republic of China to provide a Marine brigade for duty with the III MAF in I CTZ.⁴¹

CINCPAC, whose views were solicited by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, readily recognized that military benefits would derive from a GRC deployment, but he pointed out that the US Embassy in Saigon had reservations. According to CINCPAC, Ambassador Lodge did not believe that the introduction of GRC combat troops would cause Communist China to enter the war. It was Ambassador Lodge's opinion, however, that the traditional anti-Chinese attitude of the Vietnamese would hinder the usefulness of the Chinese troops. Moreover, the Ambassador had warned that the rest of the world would view such a deployment as an expansion of the war.⁴²

After considering the recommendations of the Commandant, Marine Corps, and CINCPAC's views, a Joint Staff study concluded that, while the employment of Nationalist Chinese combat troops would be "militarily useful," the possible political consequences outweighed the purely military factors. Thus no further action was taken to secure Nationalist Chinese forces for employment in South Vietnam.⁴³

40. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/814-1, 12 May 66, same file. (TS) SNIE 10-3-66, 19 May 66.

41. (TS-GP 1) CMC-43-66, 31 May 66, Encl to JCS 2343/814-2, 6 Jun 66, JMF 9155.3 (18 Apr 66).

42. (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 4336 to CINCPAC, 14 Jun 66. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 200135Z Jun 66, JCS IN 46107.

43. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/814-3, 18 Jul 66; (C) Note to Control Div, "Introduction of Additional Forces into SVN (U)," 20 Jul 66; JMF 9155.3 (18 Apr 66).

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As the result of the US decision not to solicit Chinese combat troops, there was little change in the GRC commitments in RVN. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The United States did request, and the GRC supplied, two LSTs to assist in coastal shipping. These ships had been given to the GRC by the US MAP program. Chinese naval crews in civilian clothing manned the ships, but they were supported and paid by the United States.⁴⁴

Thailand and Spain

The only other Free World nations providing military assistance to the RVN in 1966 were Thailand and Spain. On 17 February 1966, Thailand activated the Royal Thai Military Assistance Group, Vietnam (RTMAGV). The Royal Thai Air Force contingent, that had been in Vietnam since 1964, was placed under the RTMAGV. The United States and Thailand signed a Military Working Arrangement on 23 March 1966. The Arrangement placed all Thai military units and personnel in RVN under the command of the COMRTMAGV. To assure an appropriate system of control, the arrangement also provided for a Free World Military Assistance Policy Council for the RTMAGV, composed of the Chief, Joint General Staff, RVNAF, COMRTMAGV, and COMUSMACV. As was the case with most of the other third country forces, COMUSMACV would provide logistical and administrative support for the Thai forces, but the Military Working Arrangement made no provision for Thai reimbursement for this support. By the end of 1966, Thai strength in RVN stood at 224.⁴⁵

The Spanish contribution consisted of a 12-man military medical unit. The Spanish Government had announced in December 1965 that it would send a medical team to Vietnam, but it was not until 9 September 1966 that the four doctors, seven nurses, and one quartermaster captain arrived in RVN.⁴⁶

44. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 98.

45. Ibid., P. 98. (C-NOFORN except the Kingdom of Thailand-GP 4) Military Working Arrangement between COMRTMAC-V and COMUSMACV, 23 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (12 Nov 65). (TS-GP 1) NMCC OPSUM 1-67 (Supp.), 3 Jan 67, p. 35.

46. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 100.

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Other Suggestions for Third Country Forces

There were two other suggestions in the latter half of 1966 for the deployment of additional third country forces to Vietnam. The first was a COMUSMACV proposal, supported by Ambassador Lodge, for the formation of KANZUS--a multinational brigade force composed of Korean, Australian, New Zealand, and US forces--to assist in countering the large-scale NVN infiltration through the DMZ. But by late September, before Washington took any action on the proposal, CINCPAC advised the Joint Chiefs of Staff that KANZUS was no longer consistent with the enemy situation in I CTZ, which would now require a considerably greater force to counter the current multiple division enemy threat. As a result the proposal was shelved.⁴⁷

The second possibility was the introduction of a British Gurkha Brigade into RVN. This Nepalese unit of the British Army was currently employed in the Malaysia-Borneo area, but was expected to be phased out of the British Army soon. In early October, the Adjutant General of the British Army raised with the US Army Attache in London the question of using this Gurkha Brigade in South Vietnam, but the matter soon became academic when Britain decided not to phase out the Gurkha Brigade before 1969.⁴⁸

47. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 2934 to State, 080804Z Aug 66, JCS IN 38737. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 242348Z Sep 66, JCS IN 31896.

48. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 85-86.

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Chapter 33

THE WAR ON THE GROUND--STRATEGY AND OPERATIONS-1966

As the strength and effectiveness of US/FWMA forces had mounted during 1965, General Westmoreland was able to adopt an increasingly aggressive strategy designed to destroy the enemy and to seize the initiative. During 1966 as US/FWMAF strength in RVN more than doubled, COMUSMACV carried the fight to the enemy even more strongly in spite of increased infiltration (50,000 accepted, 79,000 possible). As the year progressed, General Westmoreland's troops launched sustained attacks against VC strongholds, while at the same time securing base areas and major population centers. His forces fought in regions which had been for many years under exclusive control of the VC. US operations were designed to seize and destroy VC command and operation centers, supply bases, and training areas. The aggressiveness of US/FWMA forces encouraged the RVNAF which, grew more aggressive. Spoiling attacks kept the enemy off balance and snatched from him the option he had so long enjoyed of fighting in places of his own choosing, at times and on terms most favorable to him. Improved intelligence, resulting from a greater willingness of the rural population to furnish information on the VC/NVA, brought more effective large-scale attacks on known enemy formations. Operations were no longer of short duration. Security measures to protect rice- and salt-producing areas, both vital to the rural economy, were emphasized. Air operations in RVN concentrated on logistic and combat support of ground troops. ARC LIGHT strikes disrupted enemy plans and kept him in a constant state of confusion. Naval operations designed to prevent infiltration by sea were in full swing. During the year naval bombardment of coastal areas added fire power of a new dimension to operations against the enemy.¹

The US Strategy is Challenged

The US strategy in Vietnam was publicly questioned in early 1966. General James M. Gavin, USA (Retired), charged in an article in the February 1966 issue of Harper's Magazine that the United States was stretching its forces

1. ~~(TOP SECRET)~~ (TOP SECRET-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966.

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"beyond reason" in an ill-advised effort to secure all of RVN. He maintained that the United States should not try to secure RVN in this manner but should withdraw all of its forces into a series of strong coastal enclaves, cease bombing NVN, and seek a solution to the war through the United Nations or a conference in Geneva. This criticism of US strategy by a reputable military leader, along with the growing criticism of the national policy from several other responsible quarters, disturbed high Administration officials. As a result the Joint Chiefs of Staff were directed to examine the value of General Gavin's proposals.²

The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not agree with General Gavin. They informed the Secretary of Defense on 3 February that the "enclave" strategy contained significant deficiencies and that its advantages were more illusory than real. By forfeiting the initiative, abandoning solid negotiating leverages, conceding large land areas to the enemy and alienating the GVN and other friendly governments, the "enclave" strategy would abandon national objectives. Its military consequences, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, would lead to US/GVN defeat in RVN or ultimate US abandonment of Southeast Asia.³

General Wheeler presented these same arguments in Congressional testimony. In an appearance before a Congressional committee considering military appropriations in early February, General Wheeler denied that, as General Gavin had charged, the United States was attempting to seize all of RVN. "Our objectives out there are--and General Westmoreland's strategy is--to defeat, together with Vietnamese forces, the main force of Viet Cong units and the North Vietnamese forces" He said that the United States was assisting the GVN to establish security for its population in a "police type" operation, and to assist the GVN in establishing conditions for maintaining a free government.⁴

2. James M. Gavin, "A Communication on Vietnam," Harper's Magazine, Feb 66, pp. 16-21. (TS-GP 1) DJSM-92-66 to CJCS, 19 Jan 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam 1-20 Jan 66.

3. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-76-66 to SecDef, 3 Feb 66 (derived from JCS 2343/759), JMF 9155.3 (17 Jan 66).

4. (U) Transcript of CJCS testimony before Senate Committee on Armed Services, Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66.

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The Honolulu Meeting Goals

At the Honolulu meeting of 7-8 February, the United States and the GVN renewed their pledge to fight aggression in RVN. Although the emphasis at the meeting centered on economic and social matters, the authorities of the two countries conferred on the combined military program and announced a policy of "growing military effectiveness and still closer cooperation."⁵

At this meeting military leaders of the two nations developed six specific goals to be achieved in RVN during 1966: 1) attrite, by year's end, VC/NVA forces at a rate as high as their capability to put men into the field; 2) increase the percentage of VC/NVA base areas denied the VC from 10-20 percent to 40-50 percent; 3) increase the critical roads and railroads open for use in RVN from 30 percent to 50 percent; 4) increase the population in secure areas from 50 percent to 60 percent; 5) pacify the four selected high-priority areas, increasing the pacified population in those areas by 235,000; 6) ensure the defense of military bases, political and population centers, and food-producing areas now under GVN control.⁶

The JCS Strategic Concept

Shortly after the Honolulu meeting, the Joint Chiefs of Staff restated, with little change from the pattern established in 1965, the strategic concept of operations by US/FWMAF in RVN. They informed the Secretary of Defense on 1 March that the US strategy recognized the interdependence of political, economic, sociological, and military factors in the war. In coordination with the GVN, US/FWMA forces apply discriminate military force to achieve "a stable and independent non-communist government in South Vietnam."⁷

5. (U) "Declaration of Honolulu," 8 Feb 66, reproduced in Dept of State Bulletin, LIV (28 Feb 66), pp. 305-307. (S) "Honolulu Meeting: Record Conclusions and Decisions for Further Action," Att to Memo, DepUSecState for FE Affairs, to Honolulu Participants, 17 Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66.

6. (TS) CINCPAC Briefing for SecDef, "Southeast Asia Programs," 8 Jul 66, JMF 9155.3 (8 Jul 66).

7. (TS-GP 3) Ann & App A to JCSM-130-66 to SecDef, 1 Mar 1966 (derived from JCS 2343/760-5), JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66) sec 3.

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The Joint Chiefs of Staff listed US military objectives in Vietnam as follows: 1) to cause NVN to cease its control, direction, and support of the communist insurgency in SVN and Laos; 2) to assist the GVN to defeat the Viet Cong and NVN forces in SVN; 3) to assist the GVN in extending its dominion and control over SVN, including suppression of guerrilla activity; 4) to deter the CHICOMs from direct intervention in Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the Western Pacific and to be prepared to defeat such intervention if it occurred.

The military tasks facing the United States had to be accomplished therefore both in NVN and RVN. The United States, said the Joint Chiefs of Staff, must selectively destroy the NVN military capabilities, reducing its capability to import and distribute war materials. In addition, the United States must destroy other "high-value" targets in NVN in order to punish that nation increasingly for its part in the war. In RVN the task was to find, harass, pursue, and defeat VC/NVA units, destroying their bases and disrupting their LOCs in the country and outside it. At the same time the people of RVN must be protected from communist "subversion and oppression" and selected areas within the country liberated from VC control. All US military operations had to be closely coordinated with those of the RVNAF and to be meshed as well with the other US programs, political, economic, and sociological, in RVN.

This concept, said the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had been integrated with and was designed to support GVN Rural Construction and the USMACV/JGS Combined Campaign Plan for CY 1966. US/FWMAF/RVNAF forces would carry out search-and-destroy operations, clearing and securing operations, and civic actions in areas of primary (national) and secondary (CTZ) priority. These forces would also defend GVN centers and critical installations. As a rule, US/FWMA forces would not secure areas in support of the GVN Rural Construction program except around their bases. On the other hand, every US tactical unit in the field had its own civic action program in the areas around its base--securing rice crops, protecting harvesters, and giving emergency medical assistance--all actions which which would develop popular support for the GVN.

Operations against the VC outside of secure areas would be carried out by US/FWMA forces and RVNAF reserves. The main body of the RVNAF would defend GVN installations and clear and secure areas. Search-and-destroy operations against the VC/NVA and their base areas would aim at whittling down the

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VC/NVA main forces, but not as part of the Rural Construction effort. Because of the heavy enemy buildup in several areas of RVN, the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted "the prime focus" of large, combat capable units of the US/FWMA forces and the RVNAF directed to the search-and-destroy operations.

Clearing operations, conducted tactically in the same manner as search-and-destroy operations, would be the first step in the Rural Construction program sequence of "clearing, securing, and developing." But without sufficient trained follow-on troops to reestablish effective GVN control, the clearing operations would be of little value. In theory, regular forces, US or ARVN, would provide initial security, with the RF and PF gradually taking over. Concurrently, GVN cadre and local GVN officials would be introduced into the structure. National Police would maintain civil law and order, carry out population and resource control measures, and eliminate VC agents, terrorists, and political elements.

In the past, local ARVN commanders, lacking troops, had drafted the RF and PF for offensive actions against the hard-core VC/NVA units. With the introduction of sufficient US/FWMA forces into key areas during 1965, the picture had changed. A balance of force in favor of the GVN had taken place in these areas. By early 1966 the RVNAF were being used as the concept had long provided.

Carrying Out the Strategy-Combat Operations

As 1966 began, General Westmoreland admonished his commanders to smash the VC and to destroy the NVA units in the RVN. He directed them to "find, fix and destroy" the enemy by sustained, aggressive actions, applying the tactical principle of economy of force in securing the critical bases and the principle of mass in attacking and destroying enemy units. His commanders in all the CTZs where US/FWMA combat forces operated during 1966 followed these orders with marked success. (See Map).⁸

As the battle on the ground developed during 1966 it became apparent that the enemy was still firmly resolved to win. In reaction to the US buildup, the NVA increased its

8. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p 2.

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efforts, massing its forces wherever possible to mount large-scale assaults, relying heavily on "sanctuary" areas in Laos, Cambodia, the DMZ, and in NVN. The pattern of infiltration changed markedly, as, hampered by increased US pressures in Laos, NVN began moving large numbers of men and substantial quantities of materiel directly into RVN, through the DMZ. It was in the northernmost zone, I CTZ, that the most serious threats to friendly forces developed and here that some of the fiercest fighting of the year took place.

General Westmoreland relied heavily on the "spoiling attack" to smash the enemy formations before they had built up. Aided by improved intelligence on enemy locations, he was generally successful. As the enemy resorted to building up in areas outside RVN where he could not be reached by COMUSMACV's ground forces, General Westmoreland sought changes in policy that would allow additional air and ground actions in these areas.

On 5 February COMUSMACV informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that his spoiling attacks had disrupted enemy plans for large-scale attacks. There had been fewer VC attacks since the December ceasefire, and he attributed this to the beating the VC had taken in the last months of 1965. The VC were, at least for the movement, avoiding actions which would expose their troops to greater friendly firepower. There was no evidence that the enemy was reverting back to his earlier small-scale warfare, but it was quite clear that the US/FWMAF/RVNAF had seized the initiative in some areas. As the enemy brought his forces together into larger formations, he was more exposed to friendly intelligence, and the US/GVN frequently had been able to strike him before he was ready to attack. The VC had been forced, temporarily at least, on the defensive. General Westmoreland called attention to several current operations--JEFFERSON, VAN BUREN, and WHITE WING--all of which he believed had upset VC plans.⁹

But there were clear indications that the enemy was continuing to position his forces to conduct large offensive operations. "In the immediate future," COMUSMACV predicted, "the VC will continue widespread terrorism, harassment, propaganda . . . and will increase the number of small,

9. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 0533 to CJCS, 5 Feb 65, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 65.

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hit and run attacks in an attempt to control the population and prevent the US from making any significant gains in reconstruction." COMUSMACV added that the VC/NVA would launch mass attacks whenever they believed such assaults would succeed. But they were finding it more difficult to mass forces undetected and to gain the essential surprise.

The most serious defeat incurred by friendly forces in the early part of 1966 resulted from an attack by a VC main force of three, possibly four, battalions on an isolated Special Forces Camp at A Shau near the Cambodian border on 9-10 March. Despite strong efforts to control the enemy assault with air attack, the VC overran the camp. Over 250 members of the friendly force, mainly CIDG, were killed or missing, but 103 were successfully evacuated. The loss of this border surveillance post opened up the A Shau valley, which the enemy soon developed into a major logistic base.¹⁰

General Westmoreland reported in the first week of April that, following a series of successful operations in the I CTZ (A Shau excepted), a lull had set in. He felt that this might be associated with an increased VC/NVA buildup in Quang Ngai and Quang Tri provinces which could lead to "heavy campaigning" there. On the other hand, he said, it was possible that the enemy was lying low in order not to "embarrass" the so-called Struggle Movement then in full swing around Da Nang and Hue.¹¹

Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance visited the scene of the fighting in early April. From RVN he reported to the President that the US/RVNAF were doing well militarily and continuing to impose heavy losses on the VC/NVA. "We are putting heavy pressure on their base areas," he said, "and on the movement of men and supplies within South Vietnam." The campaign was going best in the I CTZ and III CTZ areas. He noted that the enemy was making a massive effort to move the maximum number of men and supplies into RVN before the rainy season. US planes were taking a substantial toll,

10. (~~TS~~-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 364.

11. (~~TS~~) NMCC, Telecon, COMUSMACV to NMCC, 042025Z Apr 66, JCS IN 97633. See Ch. 38.

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but NVN would be able to move in more men and supplies than they needed for "the present level of operations."¹²

In early June COMUSMACV reported that the period of the current southwest monsoon was perhaps the most critical of the war thus far. The enemy had built up his combat structure greatly, with most of the increase coming in the form of NVA organized units. In spite of this expansion, the enemy was finding it hard to keep his units at effective strength. Illness and combat losses had caused a high rate of attrition, but "the enemy has plenty of fight left in him."¹³

Stepped-up air interdiction in Laos and NVN, said COMUSMACV, had cut down the enemy's rate of logistic buildup by as much as 50 percent, but he still had enough supplies to support limited objective campaigns in a number of areas. Since the monsoon would favor the enemy "because of restrictions placed on our use of air," General Westmoreland forecast that the enemy would use his present forces where he had the best chance of success--the plateau area, with a primary effort in Kontum, Pleiku, and Darlac Provinces, where he could operate out of Laos and Cambodia. His secondary efforts would likely be north and east of Saigon and in the I CTZ north of the Hai Van pass and in Quang Ngai province.

Increased Pressure in I CTZ

On 30 May General Westmoreland had reported to the US Mission Council an increase of enemy movement along the Ho Chi Minh trail and in the Laos panhandle area. A buildup of NVA forces in Cambodia across the border from Kontum, Pleiku, and Darlac Provinces had also been detected. As the enemy began to move it was crucial to beat him to the punch whenever and wherever possible. He observed, however, that his resources to deal with this problem were limited, especially if the enemy struck at a number of places at one time.¹⁴

By mid-July COMUSMACV reported that the NVA 324B division had crossed through the central and western portions of the DMZ

12. (S) Msg, DepSecDef 1886-66 to Pres, 8 Apr 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 66.

13. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 4612 to CINCPAC, 5 Jun 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66.

14. (S) Mission Council Memo No. 80, 31 May 66, same file.

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into Quang Tri province. The division, believed to be highly professional, well equipped and trained, was being supplied across the DMZ. Another large NVA force, 15,000 men, was reported to be in Laos between Tchepone and the border, and prepared to reinforce the new NVA division. A second NVA division was said to be poised just across the DMZ in NVN. COMUSMACV reported that the enemy might attempt a two-pronged attack in Quang Tri, across the DMZ and from Laos against posts along Highway 9, with a secondary attack south of Hue to cut Highway 1 and pin down reserves at Phu Bai.¹⁵

General Westmoreland believed that the recent interdiction of enemy infiltration routes in Laos had forced the NVA to find new routes across the center and western portions of the DMZ. ". . . I believe the enemy finds his planned offensive actions blunted in III corps, II Corps and southern I Corps, and that he will go for broke in the northern I Corps. We must spoil his efforts and take advantage of the opportunity to destroy his forces with all means available."¹⁶

General Westmoreland had already moved against this enemy threat to I CTZ. US Marines and ARVN forces had launched Operation HASTINGS on 15 June, following preparatory bombing by ARC LIGHT forces. Supported by tactical air, B-52 strikes, artillery, and naval gunfire, major elements of the US 3d Marine Division and units of the 1st ARVN division and the ARVN Airborne Brigade struck the enemy hard.

Operation HASTINGS consisted of a number of sharp, small unit engagements with an occasional large encounter such as that of 18 July when a US Marine battalion took on an enemy force estimated at 1,000. In this battle US artillery and air support inflicted casualties of approximately 50 percent on the enemy.

The enemy fought tenaciously from a major base in the rugged hills north of Quang Tri, supported by two main LOCs across the DMZ. He had stockpiled supplies in and north of the DMZ. Fortunately, the air campaign against the "extended battle area" north of the DMZ had destroyed much of the enemy's stockpiles and left him unable to sustain his forces in a

15. (PS) Msg, COMUSMACV 6018 to CINCPAC, 16 Jul 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 66.

16. Ibid.

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major campaign. On 30 July General Westmoreland reported that the 324B Division had been "dispersed and apparently demoralized." He no longer considered it an effective fighting force. Some enemy troops remained in Quang Tri, but many of them had moved back across the DMZ into NVN. On at least three occasions NVA troops had broken and run in the face of US Marine attacks.¹⁷

Enemy casualties were extremely heavy. US Marine commanders estimated that during July 2,400 NVA and VC had been killed by US Marines in Operation HASTINGS and attendant actions in the area.

In discussion with the US Mission Council on 2 August, General Westmoreland stated that since Hanoi had moved a whole division through the DMZ, he assumed that they planned to push even more personnel, including large units, into RVN by that route. Air operations and sea surveillance off the coast near the DMZ had been effective, he said. The basic task now was to develop a strong defensive posture on the ground south of the DMZ. He was pressing ahead with plans to accomplish this.¹⁸

The defeat of the NVA 324B Division was only temporary, and the enemy buildup in I CTZ soon resumed. In September General Westmoreland reported that the current buildup in Quang Tri Province and in, and just north of, the DMZ "constitutes a direct threat" to US/FWMA forces in I CTZ and to Quang Tri and Thu Thien Provinces. His intelligence showed that the 324B Division had been reinforced by the 341st NVA Division and that two other NVA divisions might either be in place or on the way. South of Route 9, the NVA had made extensive preparations and was already probing friendly positions. General Westmoreland feared that the enemy was preparing to "liberate" the two provinces. With the improvement of weather in the next month, the enemy could again move men and equipment into the area through Laos and engage COMUSMACV's flank from the west. At the same time, worsening weather in II and III CTZs would work to the enemy's advantage there. Utilizing his Laotian

17. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 6548 to CINCPAC, 30 Jul 66; (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 6059 to CINCPAC, 17 Jul 66; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 66. (S-GP 2) FMFPAC Rpt, "Operations of U.S. Marine Forces, Vietnam, July 1966," OCJCS Misc File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

18. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 6595 to CINCPAC, 1 Aug 66; (S) Mission Council Memo 100, 4 Aug 66; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

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routes, he could reinforce large-scale diversionary attacks further south in coordination with a main assault through the DMZ and against the US/FWMA eastern flank.¹⁹

Up to this time, as in Operation HASTINGS, COMUSMACV had used spoiling attacks to disrupt the enemy before his buildup was complete, but it now appeared that the enemy was employing a new tactic--building up in the sanctuaries of the DMZ and in NVN to prevent spoiling attacks. "Since we are unable," said COMUSMACV, "to exercise the initiative in moving ground forces into the DMZ or SVN, we are left with firepower alone as the instrument for attack. I consider it imperative in this regard that we utilize aerial delivered fire power and naval gunfire in this situation" ²⁰ General Westmoreland devised several operations, basically air, to destroy and disperse the enemy and his logistic support concentrated north of the DMZ and in Laos.

On 21 September, General Westmoreland traced the course of the enemy's efforts during the earlier parts of the year to concentrate in strength for offensive operations and the disruption and defeat of these efforts by US/FWMA/RVN forces. Nevertheless the enemy still retained considerable offensive capability, and COMUSMACV believed he would try to achieve a "dramatic victory" in the hope of influencing US public opinion prior to the November elections.²¹

COMUSMACV had directed intensified preparations to meet powerful enemy attacks against such isolated bases as Khe Sanh, Duc Co, and Loc Ninh and to counter enemy infiltration through the Laos Panhandle in the forthcoming dry season. Greater use of air power in the southern DMZ and southern NVN would help forestall a major enemy offensive. In the area just south of the DMZ, the enemy had been disrupted by the B-52 strikes and by tactical air and artillery. But he continued to move across the DMZ, and had set up a bridgehead in the rugged hills of Quang Tri.

19. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 41191 to CINCPAC, 13 Sep 66, JCS IN 99085.

20. Ibid.

21. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 8371 to CINCPAC and CJCS, 24 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.

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To bolster the forces in the North, in early October General Westmoreland directed certain US units deployed from other CTZs or diverted enroute from the CONUS to reinforce the I CTZ. These were principally 175mm gun units which, once emplaced, would be capable of delivering supporting fire throughout Quang Tri province from Khe Sanh to the sea. In addition, forces of the 3d Marine Division were redistributed in the I CTZ to improve command and control, and a US Army airborne battalion was deployed to the area.²²

By the end of the year the enemy had still not succeeded in establishing a major base area in Quang Tri Province although he continued to maintain at least two divisions in the immediate vicinity of the DMZ and to infiltrate through the zone.

II CTZ

The II CTZ, the largest of the four Corps areas, was the scene of fierce fighting in 1966. In actions ranging from isolated patrol contacts to large-scale coordinated operations, US/FWMAF and RVN forces sought out the enemy and attempted to destroy him. On several occasions, improved intelligence gave evidence of large enemy buildups, and operations were launched against these concentrations. But the enemy evaded contact and dispersed. Encounters on a smaller scale involving clashes with small groups of local VC were more effective in the first months of 1966. Between 24 January and 4 February, Operation MASHER claimed nearly 800 enemy killed. Because the designation MASHER was felt by some Washington authorities to have inhumane connotations which were bad for public relations the name of the operation was changed to WHITE WING. Future operations were given nicknames in keeping with this policy.²³

As the scope of the NVA infiltration through Laos and the buildup of the sanctuary in Cambodia continued to grow, abetted by the onset of the southwest monsoon, General Westmoreland became concerned with the danger of a multi-pronged coordinated offensive in widely scattered areas of

22. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 368.

23. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 371-79. (C) Msg, CJCS 460-66 to CINCPAC, 1 Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66.

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the II CTZ. He began operations in mid-year east of the Cambodian border, pushing westward to flush out and keep the pressure on the enemy in the border area. As the scale of enemy activity increased, it became necessary to commit the 1st Cavalry Division (AM) to support elements of the US 25th Division in the area. Results of these operations, in terms of enemy casualties and in preventing the enemy from getting set for his vaunted offensive, were satisfactory and effective. Simultaneously with these operations, COMUSMACV also carried out operations of varying scale against enemy troops in the coastal lowlands, with the intent of driving out all VC units of battalion size and of destroying enemy resources wherever they could be located.

Indicative of the effectiveness of these operations, more than 1500 VC were killed in four separate operations during June in the II CTZ.²⁴

Operations along the coast during October, in which combined US/ROK and ARVN forces participated, severely mauled the enemy, killing more than 2,000 and capturing or destroying large quantities of arms, ammunition, and food-stuffs. These operations in II CTZ opened a large area that had been enemy-dominated and -controlled for several years. In the border areas, continuous friendly pressure kept the enemy off balance as he sought to avoid contact and in many cases the enemy was forced to retire into Cambodia to escape destruction.²⁵

III CTZ

The III CTZ was the remaining Corps area where US combat forces operated during 1966. Here, differences in terrain, population factors, and enemy disposition and objectives made it necessary to conduct a campaign somewhat different from those fought in the CTZs to the north. A large, low-lying area, split by several major waterways and containing large population centers around Saigon, the III CTZ also contained major US bases and such formidable enemy strongholds

24. (~~TS-NOFORN~~-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, p. 476.

25. Ibid.

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as War Zones C and D and the mangrove swamp area, Rung Sat Special Zone. The main objectives of the campaign in this area were to increase security of the territory and to extend the area under GVN control. In I and II CTZs the primary emphasis in operations was on locating and destroying enemy forces and resources, but in III CTZ the emphasis was on the seizing and clearing of territory. In so doing US forces became engaged in heavy fighting.

Early in 1966 General Westmoreland directed that, while continuing to secure critical installations, LOCs and national priority areas in III CTZ, his forces would initiate operations to destroy VC troops and bases in the area around the Michelin Plantation and extending northwest to War Zone C in Tay Ninh province. The goal was to eliminate War Zone C as an enemy operating base. Beginning in late April, US and ARVN forces struck into Tay Ninh, discovering and destroying large stores of enemy materiel and disrupting enemy plans for offensive operations. The success of these attacks against areas that had long been considered his private domain had a demoralizing effect on the VC. His troops, in large numbers, scattered and fled into Cambodia.²⁶

Pressure on enemy base areas continued and in early June two brigades of the US 1st Infantry Division pushed into War Zone C, in Operation EL PASO II. Within a month nearly 800 enemy had been killed and huge quantities of his war supplies captured. In spite of his losses the enemy was able to recoup and resupply from nearby bases in Cambodia. By early November he had rebuilt his 9th VC Division and slipped it into Tay Ninh province to launch attacks on local objectives. But before he was ready to attack, the enemy collided with a US brigade and the resulting Operation ATTLEBORO, fought in the snarled thickets of War Zone C, became the largest operation of the war to date. In the course of the battle allied forces employed 19 battalions, the first Corps-sized operation of the war.

The enemy lost 1,100 killed in War Zone C, but more important, friendly forces achieved a limited denial to the enemy of an area that had been a communist stronghold for 30 years. US/FWMA forces deployed in the III CTZ grew from

²⁶. (IS-NORFON-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 381.

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15 maneuver battalions at the beginning of 1966 to 36 maneuver battalions at year's end. The ARVN strength increased from 48 battalions in January to 57 battalions in December.²⁷

The Delta - IV CTZ

The United States had no ground combat troops in the delta region although several thousand US combat support forces operated in support of the ARVN there. In the entire area the VC moved about freely and received a large portion of their support from this rich region. It was obvious to US planners that until US combat troops were introduced no real military gains would be made in the delta. There were, however, valid arguments against such deployments. The ARVN was proud of its unilateral role in the delta and, it was feared, would resent US "intrusion." The delta was thickly populated and introduction of US combat forces could lead to civilian resentment, have an adverse effect on the economy, and give rise to other social and political problems. From a military standpoint there were also substantial problems in finding sufficient dry land for a base and in determining just how US forces would operate in the virtually impassable swamp of the IV CTZ.²⁸

General Westmoreland studied the problem throughout 1966. Early in the year he had struck upon a concept entailing the use of a Mekong Delta Mobile Afloat Force (MDMAF). The concept involved the stationing of a US division in an area ashore where it could operate in and around the shore lines of the Mekong and Bassac rivers, supported by two USN River Assault Groups (RAG) and by sufficient converted LSTs to house a brigade. Brigades of the division would be rotated from land bases to the floating base. The US 9th Infantry Division, slated to arrive in RVN in late 1966 and early 1967, was selected as the unit to go to IV CTZ, if the plan was approved. On 5 July, the Secretary of Defense approved the activation of an MDMAF to include the two RAGs.

27. Ibid.

28. Unless otherwise indicated information in this Section is derived from (TS NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 133-143.

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At the same time CINCPAC had requested two additional RAGs that were not part of the MDMAF. The Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral McDonald, supported this request. He informed the Secretary of Defense that the RAG, which was designed to support one infantry battalion, reinforced, was a valuable adjunct to operations in the delta, particularly when supplemented by the helicopter. Not only could the two RAGs be used in the delta, but they could be effectively employed in support of US forces in the Rung Sat Special Zone and in Long An province in the III CTZ. The two additional RAGs could, if necessary, also be used to add to the effectiveness of MARKET TIME and GAME WARDEN. Admiral McDonald recommended that the Secretary support not only the MDMAF for operations in the IV CTZ but also the two additional RAGs.²⁹ The Secretary of Defense, however, did not approve the two additional RAGs at this time.

On 1 August COMUSMACV published a planning directive for operations in the delta, establishing 1 January 1967 as the date when all actions, including time-consuming dredging and construction to prepare the ground and facilities for the force, would be completed. Concurrent preparations would ready Army and Navy units to occupy facilities; operations from the base would begin about 31 January.

General Westmoreland reported to CINCPAC on 20 September that demands for his forces in the other areas of RVN made it doubtful that US forces could be sent to the delta in requisite numbers until the late spring of 1967 at the earliest. He had deployed one US battalion to the southern province of III CTZ, Long An, which was really a part of the delta. He planned also to send a US 105mm howitzer battalion to the delta at the request of the CG IV CTZ later in the year. Both of these deployments would render valuable experience when larger US deployments were made. Together with these preparations, he was dredging an area west of My Tho where, by the spring of 1967, he would establish a brigade-sized facility for use in intensifying heliborne and riverine operations by US forces in the northern delta area.³⁰

29. (S GP 3) CM-1639-66 to SecDef, 27 Jul 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 66.

30. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 8211 to CINCPAC, 20 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.

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These actions raised the question in the US Mission Council of the wisdom of sending US combat troops to the delta. The CG of ARVN forces in the delta was known to oppose introduction of US forces in his area. The US Ambassador, although he recognized the political, social and economic complications that might arise from such action, informed the Secretary of State that if US ground forces did not move into the delta the present stalemate there might not be broken.³¹

In October COMUSMACV briefed the Secretary of Defense on the MDMAF, stressing the requirement for two additional River Assault Squadrons of about 50 boats each. The US 9th Infantry Division would be the principal "riverine ground force." The Australian Task Force and elements of the US 25th Division, located in IFI CTZ, would also be used from time to time in these operations.

On 21 November COMUSMACV proposed to the Ambassador the deployment of the first US battalion of the MDMAF in January 1967. The Ambassador concurred but specified a careful "monitoring" of such deployment with a proviso that if the social, economic, and political consequences were unfavorable to overall US objectives, operations in the delta be curtailed.³²

General Westmoreland told the Ambassador on 8 December that he had two main objectives in placing US combat forces in the delta. First, he intended to step up operations against VC units and base areas. Secondly, he meant to provide security and support to expand Revolutionary Development. As a valuable side effect, placing US forces along the southern and southwestern approaches to Saigon would complete a security ring around the capital to interdict VC LOCs. He assured the Ambassador that he would abide by the "monitoring" requirements.³³

The first elements of the US 9th Infantry Division landed in Vietnam on 19 December. COMUSMACV estimated that a battalion TF from the division could move to Dong Tam, its delta base, by late January 1967.

31. (S) Msg, Saigon 6837 to State, 24 Sep 66, JCS IN 32073.

32. (S) Msg, Saigon 11978 to State, 29 Nov 66, JCS IN 57660.

33. (S) Msg, Saigon 14308 to State, 27 Dec 66, JCS IN 40108.

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The Military Situation in RVN - Late 1966

By the latter part of 1966, the military situation in RVN had improved substantially. The Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out this improvement to the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum of 14 October 1966. They noted that, since the entry of US and Free World forces into RVN, these forces had enjoyed an almost unbroken series of victories. Such enemy victories as had occurred had been at the expense of the RF and PF. The Joint Chiefs of Staff predicted that the enemy would probably be able to replace his heavy combat losses, but stated that he had suffered many bloody defeats with consequent impact on morale. They added that there was evidence that the VC was being compelled, increasingly, to resort to forced conscription to fill its ranks. Even the NVA, in replacing casualties to the 324B Division, had been required to use about 50 percent conscripts. There was also a drop in NVN infiltration during the third quarter of 1966, and NVA/VC ground combat operations were smaller, less frequent, and of shorter duration than in the early months of 1966. General Wheeler attributed this to the attrition of enemy supplies by the air campaign against NVN and by the aggressive combat operations conducted by COMUSMACV's forces.³⁴

³⁴. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-672-66 to SecDef, 14 Oct '66, JMF 9155.3 (14 Oct 66). (TS) Ltr, CJCS to SecState, 8 Feb 67, w/encl, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 14, ROLLING THUNDER 53.

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Chapter 34

ARC LIGHT - MARKET TIME - GAME WARDEN 1966

In response to the heightened intensity of ground combat in RVN during 1966, the United States increased the scale of its supporting operations, particularly air support. Operations aimed at cutting down enemy infiltration into RVN continued and new measures were begun.

ARC LIGHT

Opportunities to take advantage of the tremendous firepower of the B-52 arose frequently in 1966. More profitable B-52 targets became available as the enemy reacted to the increased aggressiveness of COMUSMACV's forces by massing more frequently, infiltrating troops at greater rates, and building new supply areas and routes. During the year General Westmoreland relied more and more upon ARC LIGHT bombers for close support, for attacks upon enemy logistics and troop concentrations, and for "spoiling" attacks, particularly along border areas. The problems that had plagued the ARC LIGHT program from its beginning in June 1965--overly centralized control, slow reaction time, and lack of a planning base--were gradually alleviated and a marked improvement in the effectiveness of the B-52 operations occurred.

Decentralization of Control

Because the approving authority for B-52 operations in RVN was retained in Washington, field commanders had complained during 1965 that much of the potential effectiveness of ARC LIGHT was being lost. On 22 January, as a result of their review of ARC LIGHT which the Secretary of Defense had directed on 18 December, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary that the current ARC LIGHT procedures were not sufficiently responsive or flexible. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary that they be granted execution authority for all B-52 strikes in RVN. They proposed to delegate this authority, if granted, to CINCPAC and CINCSAC.

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Although the Secretaries of State and Defense, and the White House, would be kept completely informed of B-52 operations being planned, all operational details would be handled by the operational commanders.¹

The Deputy Secretary of Defense granted the authority sought by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 3 March, stipulating, however, that any strike which risked border violation or noncombatant casualties must be submitted for State Department concurrence. On 15 March, the Joint Chiefs of Staff delegated approval authority to CINCPAC and CINCSAC jointly.²

Decreasing Reaction Time

General Westmoreland, on 11 May, suggested the possible use of the mobile radar (MSQ-77) to divert ARC LIGHT planes in flight to lucrative targets of opportunity. He also asked that a force of six B-52s be kept on alert on Guam in order to achieve a reaction time of ten hours from the time a strike was requested until planes were over the target. As a result of his recommendations a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) was established on Guam on 1 July, with six planes on continuous alert. All were equipped with MSQ-77 radar systems to allow inflight diversion. Later in the year, steps were taken to reduce the ten-hour reaction time.³

Additional Efforts to Enhance ARC LIGHT

The United States took additional actions during 1966 to improve the reaction time, operational status, and planning for employment of ARC LIGHT forces. The first of these measures, forward basing, had the advantage of reducing the cost per sortie and the physical strain on pilots, crews, and aircraft. Closely related to forward basing was the matter of establishing monthly sortie rates that would enable sounder planning, more equitable distribution of effort, and more positive logistic support of the ARC LIGHT program.

1. (TS) JCSM-51-66 to SecDef, 22 Jan 66 (derived from JCS 2343/663-6) JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65).
2. (TS-GP 3) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 3 Mar 66, Encl to JCS 2343/663-8, 7 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (16 Aug 65). (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6125 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 15 Mar 66.
3. (TS-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 16210 to CINCPAC, 11 May 66, JCS IN 70341. (TS NOFORN except Canada-RD-GP 1) SAC History, 1966, p. 234; (TS NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, pp. 546-548.

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Forward Basing

At the beginning of the year the 30 B-52s being used in ARC LIGHT were all based on Andersen AFB, Guam, with the 45 supporting KC-135s flying out of Kadena AFB, Okinawa. Construction to support a total of 50 B-52s on Guam was scheduled for completion in April 1966. In addition, plans had been made for additional modification of Andersen AFB to allow the basing of 70 B-52s by 1 August.⁴

The J-3 had reported to the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower) on 17 December 1965, in connection with efforts being made to raise the support level for ARC LIGHT, that it would be desirable to have an operational capability to move at least 30 B-52s to a base forward of Guam. This would shorten reaction time, lessen tanker support requirements, cut down congestion at Andersen AFB, and provide a contingency and a weather evacuation location. He pointed out that Kadena AFB had a limited B-52 capability and, if modifications were made, would offer the earliest option to provide a forward base. This could not be accomplished, however, until other bases were made ready to accommodate the tankers, possibly in Thailand or Taiwan. The matter was under study by the Air Force. The tentative forward basing plan called for completing the modification of Andersen AFB to accommodate 70 B-52s and moving 30 of the 70 B-52s to Kadena AFB as soon as the KC-135s could be moved, initially, to Thailand.⁵

General Westmoreland had called in broad terms for possible forward basing of the B-52s in his message to CINCPAC on 11 May. He renewed this request in more specific terms three months later. In so doing he reviewed the accomplishments and potential of the ARC LIGHT program, giving it high marks.

On 12 August General Westmoreland told CINCPAC that the B-52 bombing program gave the ground commander "an unprecedented advantage over the enemy." The VC/NVA feared B-52 strikes more than "anything else." Owing to terrain conditions and the lack of enough friendly troops, the B-52 was often the only weapon which could attack enemy formations building up for offensive operations. He attributed the enemy's failure to launch a "planned monsoon offensive" to the success of his own spoiling attacks, in which the B-52 bombing had played a

4. (PS-GP 4) J3M-1957-65 to ASD (M), 17 Dec 65; J-3 Files.

5. Ibid.

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major role. Because of the success of ARC LIGHT operations, even under existing handicaps, he was the more anxious to enhance these operations, if possible, by moving the B-52 bases closer to the target areas. "Guam is barely adequate as a base from which to support the war in Vietnam," he noted. "Strike reaction time, . . . is much too long, and many valuable targets are lost due to this delay." Although he recognized the political problems involved, said COMUSMACV, he recommended that the United States "press the search" for B-52 bases on Thailand, the Philippines, Okinawa, or Taiwan, and begin planning and negotiations as soon as possible.⁶

At the same time, General Westmoreland called for an increase in the number of B-52s available in Southeast Asia, for adequate stocks and production of bombs to support a sustained ARC LIGHT program, and for greatly reduced strike reaction times. Admiral Sharp fully supported COMUSMACV and, on the matter of forward basing of the B-52s, told the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he favored the establishment of B-52 bases at Kadena AFB or at U Tapao, Thailand as offering the quickest solution.⁷

On 8 September the Chief of Staff, Air Force, in support of COMUSMACV's recommendations, asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to propose to the Secretary of Defense a reappraisal of the political risks of B-52 operations from Okinawa. He further recommended that the United States seek Thailand's approval for necessary construction at U Tapao and agreement in principle for ARC LIGHT operations from that base.⁸

On 29 September the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that they had considered the possible basing of B-52s in Taiwan, the Philippines, Okinawa, and Thailand. They had compared in each case flying time to targets, construction requirements and costs, and political implications. They had rejected Taiwan and the Philippines because of political reasons and because of the substantial time required for construction of appropriate facilities. They believed that forward basing of B-52s at Kadena, and/or

6. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 27891 to CINCPAC, 12 Aug 65, JCS IN 45477.

7. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 272143Z Aug 66, JCS IN 72776.

8. (TS-GP 1) CSAFM-B-40-66 to JCS, 7 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/903, 8 Sep 66, JMF 9155 (12 Aug 66).

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U Tapao, would afford "the most timely solution" to the requirement for faster reaction times. They concluded that, in view of the estimated completion date of 1 April 1967 for B-52 facilities at Kadena, the State Department should re-appraise the political implications of operating ARC LIGHT B-52s from Okinawa and KC-135s from Taiwan; and that the United States should take immediate steps to obtain Thai approval for ARC LIGHT operations, with the requisite construction, from U Tapao. The Joint Chiefs of Staff requested that the Secretary of Defense take up these matters with the State Department.⁹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff received no immediate reply, but the matter of forward basing remained an active issue. During a visit to Andersen AFB in October, the Secretary of Defense directed that a plan be developed to base the maximum possible number of B-52s on Guam, and that a second plan be made for basing 15 B-52s in RVN by mid-February and not later than mid-April 1967.¹⁰

On 3 December the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that a plan for deploying 70 B-52s to Andersen AFB already existed. They stated further that 70 was the maximum number that should be stationed on Guam because of consideration of safety, rapid launch and recovery requirements, storage areas, and personnel support.¹¹

With regard to basing B-52s in RVN, both CINCPAC and the Secretary of the Air Force, in the course of studying the complex problems that would arise, developed strong objections to such basing. They called attention to the substantial construction effort that would be required, the additional personnel that would be needed and, particularly, the serious matter of maintaining the security of B-52 bases in RVN. Both officials came out strongly in favor of basing B-52s in Thailand as opposed to RVN. On 19 November the Secretary of the Air Force informed the Secretary of Defense that the earlier studies on B-52 basing in Southeast Asia had been reviewed and updated, and that there were compelling reasons for an early decision on the use of U Tapao.¹²

9. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-617-66 to SecDef, 29 Sep 66 (derived from JCS 2343/903-1), JMF 9155 (12 Aug 66).

10. (S-GP 4) CM-1839-66 to DJS, 17 Oct 66, JMF 9155 (17 Oct 66).

11. (S-GP 4) JCSM-743-66 to SecDef, 3 Dec 66 (derived from JCS 2343/932-1), JMF 9155 (17 Oct 66).

12. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/932-2, 1 Dec 66, JMF 9155 (17 Oct 66).

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Nevertheless, a plan was prepared for the deployment of 15 B-52s to Tuy Hoa, RVN. On 8 December the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent this plan to the Secretary of Defense. In an accompanying memorandum, however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed him that they did not favor deployment of B-52s to RVN. A study of the many problems associated with deployment of B-52s to RVN reinforced the rationale upon which their earlier recommendations for use of U Tapao has been based. They advised the Secretary that a CINCPAC plan showed that an austere forward basing for 15 B-52s at U Tapao could be prepared in four months, provided funds were made available before the "contractor horizontal construction capability" in Thailand was demobilized in December 1966.¹³

At almost the same time the Secretary of the Air Force had recommended to the Secretary of Defense early approval of establishment of a 30 B-52 capability at U Tapao, to be achieved in progressive increments starting with three B-52s in January 1967 and reaching full capacity by September 1967.¹⁴ Apparently some accord was reached between the State and Defense Departments in the first half of January 1967. On 17 January the Secretary of State instructed the US Ambassador in Thailand to approach the Thai Government to obtain its approval to use U Tapao for ARC LIGHT operations. These operations might begin as early as mid-February with as many as 15 B-52s at U Tapao by mid-April.¹⁵

The Sortie Rate

Because of the forward basing problems and shortages of air ordnance that came to light in April 1966, the establishment of ARC LIGHT monthly sortie rates at levels desired by the field commanders could not be accomplished readily. COMUSMACV had forecast in October 1965 that for the first quarter of 1966 he would need 450 ARC LIGHT sorties per month; for the second quarter, 600 sorties per month; and for the last half of the year, 800 sorties per month.¹⁶

13. (S-GP 3) JCSM-757-66 to SecDef, 8 Dec 66, (derived from JCS 2343/932-2), JMF 9155 (17 Oct 66).

14. (S-GP 4) Memo SecAF to SecDef, 6 Dec 66, Att to JCS 2353/93-17, JMF 9158 (24 May 66) sec 5.

15. (S) Msg, State 120139 to Bangkok, 17 Jan 67.

16. (S-GP 3) JCSM-667-66 to SecDef, 15 Oct 66, (derived from JCS 2343/897-1) JMF 9155 (1 Sep 66).

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The attainment of 450 sorties per month was within the capability of CINCSAC. Raising the rate to 600 sorties for the second quarter could not be accomplished because of the ammunition shortage. On 24 April, in allocating air munitions among using agencies, CINCPAC was able to set aside for ARC LIGHT only sufficient bombs to support a sortie rate of 450 per month through October. In expectation of increased bomb production, he allocated for planning purposes enough ordnance to support 600 sorties per month from November through December. On 6 July the Secretary of Defense approved a sortie rate of 600 per month to become effective on 1 November 1966.¹⁷

General Westmoreland continued to insist on the advantages of establishing the ARC LIGHT sortie rate at 800 per month as soon as it was possible to do so. He was supported in this by CINCPAC. On 3 September the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved for planning purposes an 800-per-month sortie rate to begin on 1 January 1967. Because of production slippages in certain bombs, however, it was necessary to hold the rate at 600 per month until 1 February 1967. On 11 November the Secretary of Defense approved for planning purposes a sortie rate of 800 sorties per month effective 1 February 1967. At the end of December the Joint Chiefs of Staff notified CINCPAC that this rate had been finally approved and, at the same time, authorized CINCSAC to deploy forces during January to reach 800 sorties per month not later than 1 February 1967.¹⁸

Evaluation of ARC LIGHT

In mid-July 1966 the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, had asked the Joint Staff for an appraisal of ARC LIGHT operations. The Joint Staff reported that since the

17. (TS-GP 4) J3M-1957-65 to ASD(M) 17 Dec 65; (S) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 242154Z Apr 66, JCS IN 41461; (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/897-1, 11 Oct 66. JMF 9155 (1 Sep 66). See Ch. 37 [Logistic Progress and Problems-1966] for details of air munitions shortages.

18. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 25380 to CINCPAC, 23 Jul 66, JCS IN 25023. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/897-1, 11 Oct 66, JMF 9155 (1 Sep 66). (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1805 to CINCSAC and CINCPAC, 3 Sep 66. (S-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 230259Z Sep 66, JCS IN 28446. (TS-NOFORN-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8335 to CINCPAC, 18 Nov 66. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2290 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 28 Dec 66.

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beginning of ARC LIGHT in June 1965 through 15 July 1966, 427 ARC LIGHT missions comprising 4,065 sorties had been flown and almost 81,000 tons of bombs had been expended. Assessment of battle damage and strike effectiveness had mainly been based on aerial photo reconnaissance. Reconnaissance and ground follow-up of B-52 missions had been carried out in 58 instances, and these had not furnished conclusive proof of the effectiveness of strikes. Multi-layer jungle canopies limited visual and photographic inspection and ground follow-up operations seldom swept the entire impact area because of insufficient men or tactical requirements.¹⁹

In the first year of ARC LIGHT operations 67 interdiction missions had been conducted, and 49 of these had struck at infiltration routes in Laos. Seventy-nine missions had been flown in direct support of ground operations, and 39 of these had some degree of follow-up. Only a few damage assessments had resulted from the ground follow-up, but the success of the ground operations indicated that ARC LIGHT support had been a contributing factor of some importance. Thirty-eight "spoiling" missions had been flown, with a limited number of reports indicating structural damage, secondary explosions, and disruption of the enemy's planned attacks. In the fourth category of mission, harassment and disruption, there were 243 strikes. Damage assessments reported the destruction of, among other things, fortifications, tunnels, structures, ammunition dumps, and storage. The number of comprehensive strike assessments was limited, owing to targets being remote and isolated.

The Joint Staff found that, although the total effects of the B-52 bombings could not be fully assessed, there had been significant psychological results. The bombings had helped to lower VC morale, increased VC desertion and defection, forced some changes in VC tactics, and disrupted to some extent the VC economy. US ground commanders whose operations had benefited from ARC LIGHT strikes had expressed recognition of a valuable contribution to the total military effort by the B-52 strikes.

¹⁹. (43-GP 3) DJSM-955-66 to Actg CJCS, 25 Jul 66, w/encl, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 66.

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COMUSMACV's insistence on the need for an 800-sortie rate had impelled the Deputy Secretary of Defense to ask the Joint Chiefs of Staff for an evaluation of nearly every aspect of the entire program since its inception. He was concerned over the high costs of ARC LIGHT, especially at the 800-sortie level, and the lack of data on the actual "sortie effectiveness" of the bombings. He noted that at the 800-sortie level the ordnance costs alone would be almost \$500 million for CY 1967. Including other incremental costs, the total figure could reach \$650-780 million per year.²⁰

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 15 October that the performance of the B-52 force had been "outstanding." By 30 September 1966 ARC LIGHT planes had flown 597 missions (5,181 sorties) against targets in SE Asia and had dropped 101,235 tons of bombs. The average number of sorties per mission had been 8.7. The force had responded to every approved mission and, of 5,266 sorties scheduled, 5,181 had arrived over target. Ninety-seven and six-tenths percent of the bombs scheduled had been released over the designated targets.²¹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff emphasized the valuable, and unique, capability which ARC LIGHT provided. B-52s could attack the enemy regardless of time of day, weather, or location of the enemy, covering a large area in a short time with a heavy concentration of destructive firepower. The threat of B-52 strikes had deterred enemy concentrations and wrought havoc with the morale of his forces. It had proven itself in the past and would do so again, particularly if the forward basing of B-52s were put into effect.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff noted specifically that "B-52 bombing provides a military capability in Southeast Asia which cannot feasibly be provided by any other available weapon system and which is required by the operational commander in support of combat operations."²²

20. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 1 Sep 66, Att to JCS 2343/897, 8 Sep 66, JMF 9155 (1 Sep 66).

21. (S-GP 3) JCSM-667-66 to SecDef, 15 Oct 66 (derived from JCS 2343/897-1), JMF 9155 (1 Sep 66).

22. Ibid.

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By the end of the year, when ARC LIGHT was suspended as a result of the Christmas and New Year's holiday truces, a total of 5,217 ARC LIGHT sorties had been flown; several hundred of these had been directed against targets in Laos, the DMZ, and NVN.²³

MARKET TIME

MARKET TIME operations continued throughout 1966. As in 1965, these operations consisted of US Navy and VNN patrols and surveillance of RVN coastal waters to interdict the waterborne infiltration of men and material. MARKET TIME operations were conducted in the same manner and under the same rules of engagement as in 1965. In February 1966, eight additional Swifts (Patrol Craft, Fast-PCF) arrived and began operations, bringing the in-country total to 20. By the end of July this number had grown to 70, and at the year's end, the full programmed force of 84 Swifts was on station. As US MARKET TIME forces gradually increased during the year, there was an almost proportionate decline in participation by the VNN Coastal and Sea Forces.²⁴

MARKET TIME operations in 1966 searched or contacted thousands of small junks, sampans, and other watercraft. In the course of these operations, 60 junks and 22 sampans were destroyed with 129 enemy killed and 54 captured. The effectiveness of MARKET TIME may be measured by the decline of sea infiltration after the commencement of the operations. In mid-1965, sea infiltration accounted for an estimated 70 percent of the total infiltration into RVN, but by August 1966, this figure had declined to 10 percent.²⁵

In addition to preventing innumerable small-scale infiltration attempts, MARKET TIME foiled two large-scale infiltration efforts in 1966. On 10 May, the USCG Cutter POINT GREY sighted an unidentified trawler (steel-hulled) off the southeast tip of the Ca Mau Peninsula. The trawler refused to identify itself, eventually went aground, and was abandoned by its crew. When POINT GREY personnel attempted to board the

23. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, pp. 544-82.

24. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, pp. 597, 603.

25. (~~S NOFORN~~-GP 1) DIA/JCS, Southeast Asia Military Fact Book, Apr 66, DIAISUP-105-66, pp. 39-41; Jul 66, DIA-ISUP-182-66, p. 43; Oct 66, DIAISUP-274-66, p. A-40; Jan 67, DIAISUP-3-67, p. A-50. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 406.

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trawler, they were repulsed by heavy ground fire from the beach. The POINT GREY called in air and naval support to shell the beach. The trawler was also fired upon and it broke in two as the result of a violent secondary explosion. Subsequent salvage operations recovered weapons, ammunition, and electronics material of Soviet and Chinese Communist manufacture.²⁶

A similar incident occurred on 19 June 1966 when the USCG Cutter POINT LEAGUE contacted another steel-hulled trawler off the mouth of the Co Chien River. The trawler refused to stop or identify itself, and returned heavy fire when challenged by the POINT LEAGUE. With USN and VNN air and naval support, the trawler was boarded and captured. Six crewmen were killed and two captured. Cargo taken from the trawler included ammunition, mortars, automatic weapons, recoilless rifles, rocket launchers, machine guns and side arms.²⁷

GAME WARDEN

Although US ground forces carried out no combat operations in the Mekong Delta in 1966, US Navy forces did engage in operations against the VC along the waterways which laced the Delta. Other operations by these naval forces were carried out along the river channel approaches by which all shipping reached Saigon, the Rung Sat Special Zone (RSSZ).

During 1966 the GVN began large-scale operations to pacify VC-controlled areas in the Delta. Effective control of the rivers and waterways in this region was of paramount importance to the success of these operations. A concept for maintaining such control had been developed by COMUSMACV and CHNAVGP in early August 1965. This concept called for US Navy boat patrols and inshore surveillance to enforce curfews and prevent VC infiltration, movement, and supply along the Delta estuary coast and across the major rivers of the Delta and the RSSZ. On 18 December 1965 CTF 116, GAME WARDEN, was established to carry out this concept.²⁸

26. ~~(TS-NOFORN-GP 1)~~ COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 406-407.

27. Ibid., pp. 407-408. ~~(TS-NOFORN-GP 1)~~ CINCPAC Command History, 1966, p. 602.

28. ~~(TS-NOFORN-GP 1)~~ COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 409.

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During early 1966 the enemy increased his efforts to block the channel to Saigon by mining and by harassing the passing river traffic with mortar and gun fire. GVN counter-action, despite US support, was ineffective. In April two ten-boat sections of the GAME WARDEN force became operational, one section deploying to the area of Nha Be and the other to Vung Tau for patrols in the RSSZ. These River Patrol Boats (PBRs) were constructed of fiberglass, armored lightly at vulnerable points, and capable of 37 knots with water-jet propulsion. They were manned by US crews and carried twin .50-caliber machine guns fore and aft. Their operations included patrols, ambushes and combined operations in the RSSZ. Working in conjunction with armed helicopters flying in from shore bases or off a specially configured LST, the PBRs proved highly effective.

On 27 June the GVN submitted to the US Ambassador a formal request for US technical, material, and operational assistance in halting VC actions on the waterways of RVN. This note, forwarded to Washington on 1 July, constituted the legal basis and authority for US assistance in control of RVN waterways.²⁹

By mid-September 1966 GAME WARDEN had 95 PBRs operating in the major rivers of the Mekong Delta, along with six armed helicopters. In addition, 12 minesweepers (MSBs) were carrying out operations in the river approaches to Saigon, and a SEAL (Sea, Air, Land) team detachment was conducting surveillance and raids in the Delta. By this time, GAME WARDEN operations had accounted for 50 VC killed and 23 captured; nine VC boats had been destroyed and 13 damaged. Also large quantities of enemy foodstuffs had been seized or destroyed and many VC documents captured.³⁰

Because GAME WARDEN forces had been operating without specific rules of engagement, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested CINCPAC to submit such rules. On 18 July CINCPAC forwarded proposed rules of engagement that had been concurred in by the US Ambassador. He also included operational guidance

29. Ibid. (~~TS~~-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, pp. 594-97. (~~S~~-GP 3) JCS 2343/874, 19 Dec 66, JMF 9155.3 (16 Apr 66).

30. Ibid.

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for GAME WARDEN. The Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded proposed rules of engagement and operational guidance based on CINCPAC's recommendations to the Secretary of Defense on 17 August, asking for his approval. On 24 August, the Department of Defense sought State Department concurrence. This was not received until late October, and it was not until 8 November that the Secretary of Defense approved the final rules of engagement and operational guidance for GAME WARDEN.³¹

The rules of engagement for GAME WARDEN were based on the Rules of Engagement for Southeast Asia issued in April 1965. Slight modifications to meet the particular requirements of GAME WARDEN had been introduced. When GAME WARDEN forces operated in the MARKET TIME areas, they would observe the MARKET TIME rules. When operating near the Cambodian border, GAME WARDEN forces were not authorized immediate pursuit but could defend themselves from attackers located inside Cambodia. The operational guidance for GAME WARDEN directed that to the maximum extent feasible US vessels engaged in GAME WARDEN operations would have aboard GVN representatives who would be very conspicuous to all observers and would, if present, lead boarding parties. GVN representatives would recommend actions to be taken, i.e., detainment or release of vessels, but the final decision would be the responsibility of the US commander. The Joint Chiefs of Staff sent these approved rules of engagement and the operational instructions to CINCPAC on 16 December.³²

By this time GAME WARDEN had been underway almost a year and had contributed to the Revolutionary Development Program in the IV CTZ. Merchants and farmers in the area could move about much more freely and safely and VC tax collection and terrorist activities had been reduced. GAME WARDEN forces now included 120 patrol boats, 2 patrol air cushion vehicles, 11 MSBs, 8 helicopters and support craft.

31. (S-GP 3) JCSM-517-66 to SecDef, 17 Aug 66 (derived from JCS 2343/874); (S-GP 3) Ltr, ASD(ISA) to DepASecState for FE Affairs, 24 Aug 66, Att to JCS 2343/874-1, 6 Oct 66; (U) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 15 Oct 66, Att to JCS 2343/874-2, 31 Oct 66; (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 8 Nov 66, Att to JCS 2343/874-3, 10 Nov 66; JMF 9155.3 (16 Apr 66).

32. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1627 to CINCPAC, 16 Dec 66. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 1629 to CINCPAC, 16 Dec 66.

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Enemy killed by GAME WARDEN forces totaled 239 (body count) plus over 200 more possible. Enemy boats in the number of 352 had been destroyed, 75 damaged, and 37 captured. Friendly casualties included 8 killed, 80 wounded, and 3 missing in action. One MSB had been sunk by a VC mine and four helicopters lost to enemy action or accident.³³

Naval Component Command for COMUSMACV

With the growth of MARKET TIME and GAME WARDEN operations, there was a need for more efficient US Navy command arrangements in RVN. Until early 1966, the Commanding General, III Marine Amphibious Force (CG III MAF), under the operational control of COMUSMACV, served as the naval component commander for MACV in addition to his responsibilities as a tactical commander and as the senior US advisor to CG, I CTZ (ARVN). At the same time, under COMUSMACV, there was the Chief, US Naval Advisory Group (CHNAVGP). He served as COMUSMACV's principal Navy advisor, but did not have a formal link to the naval component commander or to CINCPACFLT. He was responsible, however, for the Naval Advisory Group, MARKET TIME (TF 115), and GAME WARDEN (TF 116) activities.³⁴

To provide a more responsive command organization, COMUSMACV and CINCPAC proposed in January 1966 the following changes in command arrangements for the MACV Naval Component Command: 1) that a major Navy command with assigned units be established in RVN, assigned to CINCPACFLT, but under the operational control of COMUSMACV; 2) that this command be titled US Naval Forces, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (NAVFORV), with headquarters in Saigon, commanded by a flag officer, and staffed to discharge naval component command functions; 3) that COMNAVFORV be designated the MACV naval component commander and perform all appropriate functions, including the exercise of operational control of TF 115 and TF 116; 4) that III MAF, with assigned units, be designated a separate uni-Service command directly subordinate to COMUSMACV, though continuing under CG FMFPAC in the Service chain of command.³⁵

33. (~~TS~~ ~~NOFORN~~ GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, p. 597.

34. (~~S~~ GP 3) JCS 2343/767, 10 Feb 66, JMF 9155.3 (13 Jan 66).

35. (~~S~~ GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 1175 to CINCPAC, 13 Jan 66, - JCS IN 48923; (~~S~~ GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 251120Z Jan 66, JCS IN 69133; same file.

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The Joint Chiefs of Staff accepted the COMUSMACV/CINCPAC proposals, and with Secretary of Defense approval, they directed the Chief of Naval Operations and CINCPAC on 14 February to implement the changes in command arrangements. On 1 April 1966, Rear Admiral N.G. Ward assumed command of NAVFORV.³⁶

36. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 3964 to CNO and CINCPAC, 14 Feb 66 (derived from JCS 2343/767), same file. (TS-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, pp. 467-468.

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Chapter 35

BORDER AREA PROBLEMS AND THE BARRIER

Throughout 1966, COMUSMACV's military operations were hindered by the increased VC/NVA use of the sanctuaries afforded by the border areas of Cambodia, Laos, and the DMZ. In these havens, immune from US attack, the enemy recouped and resupplied his forces and massed for new drives in South Vietnam. North Vietnam had long taken advantage of the border areas for infiltration purposes, and with the intensified US operations in late 1965 and 1966, Hanoi stepped up its infiltration. During 1966, US military commanders repeatedly sought authority to strike the sanctuary areas, but in many instances political considerations overruled military requirements. In the latter part of the year, the United States began planning the construction of a defensive barrier just south of the DMZ to impede enemy infiltration across the DMZ into South Vietnam.

Cambodia

The problem of the Cambodian sanctuary was not new. In the Fall of 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had described the problem to higher authorities, and recommended a series of political and military actions to eliminate this threat, including authority for maneuver operations and immediate pursuit into Cambodia. The State Department opposed any actions that would violate Cambodian territorial integrity, and the only authority granted COMUSMACV was to take those counteractions necessary for self-defense in emergency situations involving VC/PAVN attacks from Cambodia. Nonemergency maneuver operations or return of fire into Cambodia required prior Washington approval.¹

In mid-March 1966, COMUSMACV launched Operation LINCOLN, a series of spoiling attacks in western Pleiku Province near the Cambodian border, designed to disrupt VC base areas and neutralize the enemy buildup in the high plateau. Because the border was "vague" in this area, and in order to gain tactical advantage and cut off enemy escape routes, General

1. See above, Ch. 24.

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Westmoreland requested authority for maneuver operations into Cambodia. Ambassador Lodge supported the MACV request, and to call world attention to the VC violation of Cambodian territory, he suggested to Washington that the growing "definite evidence" of VC utilization of Cambodia be released to the world press.²

Again Washington disapproved any maneuver operations into Cambodia. The State and Defense Departments advised Saigon that it was not in the "over-all US interest" to go beyond existing authorizations for US commanders to attack across the Cambodian border in self-defense, and that the suggested release of information was not advisable. In explaining the Washington decision, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, told both CINCPAC and COMUSMACV that existing authority should suffice to deal with enemy units in Cambodia. The two commanders were directed to use this authority "boldly," and to advise the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the requirements and circumstances promptly.³

In addition to the specific request for maneuver operations in Cambodia in connection with Operation LINCOLN, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on two occasions in the first half of 1966 sought general authority for immediate pursuit into Cambodian territory, but the Secretary of Defense denied these requests. He found the "existing special instructions" regarding operations in the vicinity of the Cambodian border adequate under current circumstances.⁴

In another effort at eliminating the Cambodian sanctuary, COMUSMACV had, in early February, recommended the development

2. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, 28 Mar 66, JCS IN 84950. (~~TS~~) Msg, COMUSMACV to JCS, 31 Mar 66, JCS IN 89658. (~~TS~~-GP 4) Msg, Saigon 4120 to State/Defense, 21 Apr 66, JCS IN 35359.

3. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7460 to CINCPAC, 31 Mar 66. (S) Msg, JCS 1710-66 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 31 Mar 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 66. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Jt State-Def Msg, (State 3212) to Saigon, 26 Apr 66, JCS IN 44793.

4. (~~TS~~-GP 4) JCSM-8-66 to SecDef, 7 Jan 66 (derived from JCS 2339/171-3); (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-295-66 to SecDef, 9 May 66 (derived from JCS 2339/171-5); (~~TS~~-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 16 May 66, Encl to JCS 2339/171-6, 18 May 66; JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65).

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of a force capability for either covert or overt cross-border operations into Cambodia to mitigate the possibility of surprise attack on US/GVN forces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff supported this recommendation, and in a memorandum of 9 May 1966 proposed to the Secretary of Defense the organization, training, and equipping of an indigenous force consisting initially of 30 clandestine intelligence agents, sixteen 20-man reconnaissance teams, four 150-man reaction companies, and one 150-man security unit. These forces would be deployed against targets on the RVN side of the Cambodian border. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also requested the necessary funding and deployment of 156 additional US Army Special Forces personnel to RVN to support the indigenous force.⁵

The State Department accepted the wisdom of planning for possible operations in Cambodia, but opposed the actual operations at that time. Deputy Assistant Secretary Unger told the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) on 7 June 1966 that there should be no designation of forces for possible use in Cambodia since it would inevitably become public knowledge, "with unfortunate repercussions"; nor should there be any recruitment of ethnic Cambodians (Khmers) in RVN for such purposes.⁶

Subsequently, the Secretary of Defense approved on 13 June the development and funding of a force capability for possible future cross-border operations. He emphasized that this did not constitute approval to commit the force into Cambodia and directed that the State Department views, including the prohibition against the recruitment of ethnic Cambodians, be taken into account in developing the capability. Several weeks later the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved the deployment of the requested Army Special Forces augmentation to support the Cambodian cross-border capability. The project was designated DANIEL BOONE.⁷

5. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC and JCS, 1 Feb 66, JCS IN 78527; (TS-GP 1) JCSM-309-66 to SecDef, 9 May 66 (derived from JCS 2343/820); JMF 9155 (1 Feb 66).

6. (TS) Memo, DepAsstSecState for FE Affairs to Dir, Far East Region (ISA), 7 Jun 66, Att to Encl to JCS 2343/820-1, 15 Jun 66, same file.

7. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 13 Jun 66, Encl to JCS 2343/820-1, 15 Jun 66, same file. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 27 Jun 66, Encl to JCS 2343/760-70, JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66) sec 12.

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A different but concurrent effort to solve the Cambodian sanctuary problem had been instituted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in late 1965. This effort involved political pressure on the Royal Cambodian Government (RKG, for Royal Khmer Government) to prevent the VC/NVA forces from using its territory and psychological pressure on the NVA personnel in Cambodia.

In November 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had proposed political action to persuade the RKG to cease its tacit support of the VC--support that was manifested by the RKG's tolerance of the VC use of Cambodian territory. They had also suggested the enlistment of third country pressure on Prince Sihanouk to the same end. In January 1966 the Acting Secretary of State, although he recognized the importance of political and psychological pressure on the RKG, declined to initiate any specific actions for fear that Cambodia might be pushed into active belligerency against RVN.⁸

In April 1966, COMUSMACV, Ambassador Lodge, and CINCPAC all requested permission to initiate a psychological operations campaign plan, involving night leaflet drops against NVN personnel in Cambodia. The request was supported by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but higher authorities approved only the wind-drift of leaflets into Cambodian territory opposite the Pleiku/Darlac Provinces. This was authorized on 26 May 1966, and the operation was extended on 6 June to include the Cambodian area opposite Kontum Province.⁹

On 27 August 1966, the Joint Chiefs of Staff again advised the Secretary of Defense that there was a need for continuing political efforts to persuade the RKG to stop its support of, or collusion with, the NVA/VC forces, and they recommended the preparation of an interagency psychological operations plan. The purpose of such a plan would be to

8. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-812-65 to SecDef, 12 Nov 65 (derived from JCS 2366/7-1); (TS-GP 3) Ltr, Actg SecState to SecDef, 17 Jan 66, Encl to JCS 2366/7-3, 20 Jan 66; JMF 9155.1 (14 Oct 65).

9. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 26 Apr 66; JCS IN 44755. (TS) Jt State-Def-USIA Msg, (State 3641) to Saigon and CINCPAC, 26 May 66, JCS IN 95467. (TS) Jt State-Def-USIA Msg, (State 1469) to Saigon, 6 Jun 66, JCS IN 30739. (TS-GP 1) JCS 2366/9, 22 Aug 66, JMF 9155.1 (25 Jun 66).

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promote an understanding on the part of the RKG of US objectives, the Free World determination to achieve "ultimate victory" in RVN, and the advantages to Cambodia of supporting Free World aims.¹⁰

Shortly after their request for a psychological operations plan for Cambodia, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at CINCPAC's behest, requested the Secretary of Defense to seek State Department reconsideration of the prohibition against the recruitment of ethnic Cambodians for possible cross-border operations into Cambodia. The Joint Chiefs of Staff explained the operational advantages of using personnel familiar with the area, language, and customs of the Cambodian people, and they pledged that all ethnic Cambodians would be closely screened and that careful security measures would be observed.¹¹

The State Department once again objected to the JCS recommendations on both the psychological operations plan for Cambodia and the recruitment of ethnic Cambodians for possible cross-border operations. In appreciation of the many policy and operational considerations that had arisen, and promised to arise again, the Deputy Secretary of Defense requested the Under Secretary of State and the Director of Central Intelligence to form a joint State-Defense-CIA Study Group to consider problems associated with Cambodia. The Defense Department would have two representatives, one from OSD and one from OJCS. The State Department agreed, and the State-Defense-CIA Study Group on Cambodia was established on 21 December 1966. The Group did not complete its study until May 1967.¹²

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were not satisfied with the higher level decisions with regard to Cambodia. In a memorandum of 19 December 1966, they urged the Secretary of Defense to seek a review of national policy toward Cambodia

10. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-547-66 to SecDef, 27 Aug 66 (derived from JCS 2366/9), JMF 9155.1 (25 Jun 66).

11. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 130401Z Aug 66, JCS IN 48355. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-612-66 to SecDef, 24 Sep 66 (derived from JCS 2343/820-2), JMF 9155 (1 Feb 66).

12. (TS) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 3 Dec 66, Encl to JCS 2343/820-3, 7 Dec 66; (TS-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 4 Jan 67, Encl to JCS 2343/820-5; 5 Jan 67; (TS-GP 1) Ltr, USecState to DepSecDef, 9 May 67, Encl to JCS 2343/820-6, 24 May 67; JMF 9155 (1 Feb 66).

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in the light of overall US objectives in Southeast Asia and the continuing use of the Cambodian sanctuary by the VC/NVA. They noted the proposal for a joint State-Defense-CIA Study Group, but pointed out that this approach would take time. In the interval, they recommended an expansion and intensification of the overall intelligence collection program in Cambodia, including authorization for ground reconnaissance operations such as DANIEL BOONE [REDACTED] on a regular basis. They also requested authority for medium- and low-level day/night photography, airborne radio detection (ARDF), and infrared (IR) and side-looking airborne radar (SLAR) operations on a continuing basis into Cambodia to a depth of 75 nm (excluded was a 25 nm area around Phnom Penh). Further, they sought authority for immediate pursuit of actively engaged VC/NVA forces that withdrew into Cambodia. They also requested a more extensive coordinated public affairs and information program and supporting psychological operations to focus attention on Cambodian support of the VC/NVA and to dissuade the RKG from continuing such support. No action was taken on these proposals by higher authorities; apparently, they were awaiting the recommendation of the State-Defense-CIA Study Group.¹³

Laos

North Vietnam had long used the Laos Panhandle as a primary infiltration route to support the VC. With the commitment of US/Free World combat forces to the struggle in 1965, the enemy also began to rely on the Laotian border area as a safe haven for their troops. On 7 January 1966, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the Secretary of Defense to approve new rules of engagement for Southeast Asia, including provision for immediate pursuit of hostile land forces into Laos. When by early April there had been no response to their request, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 6 April apprised the Secretary of Defense of the increasing attacks by enemy forces entering RVN from Laos. As an example, they cited the 9 March attack by VC/NVA forces on the A Shau Special Forces Camp, "one of many US/friendly installations located within close tactical distance of the Laos border." Pending authorization for immediate pursuit, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested authority for US/Free World forces operating in the RVN near the Laos border similar to that granted in December 1965 for

13. (PS-GP 3) JCSM-779-66 to SecDef, 19 Dec 66 (derived from JCS 2366/10-1), JMF 9155.3 (28 Jul 65).

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emergency operations near the Cambodian/RVN border. The Secretary of Defense approved this request, and on 9 June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized US forces near the RVN/Laos border, in emergency situations, to take the necessary counteractions "in the exercise of the right of self-defense" against enemy attacks from locations in Laos. Such counteractions included artillery and air strikes and maneuver into Laos while actually engaged and in contact with enemy forces. An emergency was considered to exist when, in the commander's judgment, the urgency for action in self-defense precluded prior approval. The new authority specified that Laotian villages would not be attacked except when fire was being received from them or when it was essential for the preservation of the US/Free World forces. Any other operations in Laos continued to require prior Washington approval.¹⁴

In May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff again asked the Secretary of Defense to approve new rules of engagement for Southeast Asia that would include the blanket authority for immediate pursuit into Laos, but the Secretary of Defense replied that existing authorities seemed adequate. He added that urgent consideration would be given this matter when the situation warranted it.¹⁵

In a further effort to reduce enemy use of the Laos Panhandle sanctuary, the United States in 1966 expanded SHINING BRASS operations. In early 1966, COMUSMACV requested approval to develop three battalions of Nung tribesmen for the immediate purpose of securing SHINING BRASS forward launch bases and for operations against SHINING BRASS targets on the RVN side of the Laos border. The Joint Chiefs of Staff supported this request and recommended to the Secretary of Defense the approval for recruitment and funding of three 540-man Nung battalions and the deployment of 127 additional US Army Special Forces personnel to RVN to advise the Nung force. The Secretary of Defense approved the JCS recommendation on 11 April,

14. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-8-66 to SecDef, 7 Jan 66 (derived from JCS 2339/171-3), JMF 9150 (16 Feb 65). (TS-GP 4) JCSM-216-66 to SecDef, 6 Apr 66 (derived from JCS 2339/223); (TS-GP 1) Msg, JCS 4007 to CINCPAC, 9 Jun 66; JMF 9155 (23 Mar 66).

15. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-295-66 to SecDef, 9 May 66 (derived from JCS 2339/171-5); (TS-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 16 May 66, Encl to JCS 2339/171-6, 18 May 66; JMF 9150 (16 Feb 66).

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carefully stipulating that the Nung battalions would be employed only in RVN and that use made of them in cross-border operations would be a matter for future decision in light of political/military developments. Five days later, the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved the deployment of the 127 Special Forces advisors to support the Nung battalions.¹⁶

The commitment of the Nung battalions to actual cross-border operations in Laos hinged on the concurrence of the US Ambassador in Vientiane, and on 18 May 1966, Ambassador Sullivan concurred in a COMUSMACV proposal for their use in the Laos Panhandle. However, Ambassador Sullivan imposed certain operational restrictions with regard to the size, depth, and duration of the penetrations into Laos and requested advance notice of the intent to launch operations. Subsequently, CINCPAC recommended expansion of SHINING BRASS in accordance with the Sullivan-Westmoreland agreement.¹⁷

The Joint Chiefs of Staff passed this recommendation on to the Secretary of Defense, who approved it on 16 June 1966. Secretary McNamara directed that both he and the Secretary of State be informed simultaneously with Ambassador Sullivan of the intention to launch missions. This action constituted approval of Phase II of the SHINING BRASS concept approved in principle in September 1965.¹⁸

ARC LIGHT Operations in Laos and NVN

The first B-52 bombings outside of RVN had taken place on 10 December 1965 when B-52s, with the knowledge of Laotian Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma, hit an enemy supply area

16. (TS-GP 1) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 8 Jan 66, JCS IN 41106. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-191-66 to SecDef, 31 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2343/601-7); (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 11 Apr 66, Encl to JCS 2343/601-8, 13 Apr 66; (S-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 16 Apr 66, Encl to JCS 2343/601-9, 18 Apr 66; JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65) sec 1.

17. (TS) Msg, Vientiane 724 to State, 18 May 66, JCS IN 10692. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 28 May 66, JCS IN 10666.

18. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-378-66 to SecDef, 7 Jun 66 (derived from JCS 2343/601-10); (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 16 Jun 66, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/601-10, 20 Jun 66; JMF 9155 (27 Mar 65) sec 2.

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astride the RVN-Laotian border. Press reports of the bombing in Laos caused Souvanna Phouma to react adversely. Although bombings by B-52s continued in the border areas of Laos, to interdict the Ho Chi Minh trail, most of the strikes were not cleared with the Prime Minister. Each strike in Laos was made simultaneously with a "cover" strike in RVN to draw press attention away from the Laotian target.¹⁹

In March and April requests from COMUSMACV to use ARC LIGHT strikes to block the Mu Gia Pass leading from NVN into Laos were concurred in by CINCPAC and Ambassador Sullivan. The Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized, on 8 April, ARC LIGHT bombing of the NVN side of the Mu Gia Pass. The strike took place three days later. COMUSMACV's request for a second strike was not so readily agreed to by CINCPAC but he was eventually persuaded, and a second strike was authorized on 22 April. Although General Westmoreland asked for continuing ARC LIGHT bombing of the Mu Gia Pass, CINCPAC believed it would be a waste of bombs, already in short supply. The Joint Chiefs of Staff turned down COMUSMACV's request on 30 April.²⁰

General Westmoreland began in late April proposing ARC LIGHT bombing of specific enemy targets that had been detected in Laos. Because these targets were well inside Laos, the US Ambassador objected on the ground that the strikes would have to be approved by Souvanna Phouma. The Ambassador was reluctant to seek such approval. He also questioned the military necessity of ARC LIGHT bombings in Laos. Nevertheless as the enemy buildup in Laos became more and more visible, COMUSMACV continued to ask during May and June for ARC LIGHT bombings well inside the border of Laos. These requests were not

19. ~~(TS-NOFORN)~~ except Canada-RD-GP 1) SAC History, 1966, pp. 248-249.

20. (S) Msg, COMUSMACV 08332 to CJCS, 17 Mar 66, JCS IN 64994. ~~(TS-GP 3)~~ Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 032150Z Apr 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 66. ~~(S-GP 2)~~ Msg, Vientiane 1064 to State, 7 Apr 66, JCS IN 12552. ~~(TS-GP 3)~~ Msg, JCS 8110 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 8 Apr 66. ~~(S-GP 3)~~ Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 200221Z Apr 66, JCS IN 32747. ~~(S-GP 3)~~ Msg, JCS 9105 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 22 Apr 66. ~~(S-GP 3)~~ Msg, COMUSMACV 14735 to JCS 29 Apr 66, JCS IN 49602. ~~(TS-GP 3)~~ Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 300405Z Apr 66, JCS IN 51806. ~~(S-GP 3)~~ Msg, JCS 9782 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 30 Apr 66.

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concurred in by the Ambassador and thus not approved. On 16 July General Westmoreland, calling attention to the rapid enemy buildup in Laos, and in the area just north of the DMZ, sought once again to have the restrictions lifted so that B-52s could strike enemy logistical and training areas in Laos. He also asked at this time for authority to strike identified enemy targets in the DMZ west of the populated areas.²¹

General Westmoreland visited Ambassador Sullivan at Udorn on 19 July to discuss lifting restrictions. He asked that the Ambassador attempt to obtain Souvanna Phouma's approval even though there was a risk that the latter would turn down the request. COMUSMACV also recognized that the Prime Minister's refusal would make it even more difficult to continue the B-52 strikes being conducted along the frontier without the Prime Minister's knowledge.²²

One month later, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that "the expected damage to be achieved by striking the proposed targets is worth the risk of possible disapproval of future B-52 strike requests in Laos." They supported COMUSMACV's request that Ambassador Sullivan be authorized to consult with Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma to conduct the ARC LIGHT strikes against Laotian targets.²³

On 13 September, a joint State-Defense cable directed Ambassador Sullivan to seek Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma's approval to conduct eight ARC LIGHT strikes in Laos. The Ambassador was instructed to make it clear to the Prime Minister that the United States, while not willing to deny completely communist charges of US air operation in Laos,

21. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 14056 to CINCPAC, 23 Apr 66, JCS IN 39120. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 14052 to CINCPAC, 23 Apr 66, JCS IN 39071. (TS-GP 2) Msg, Vientiane 1120 to State, 26 Apr 66, JCS IN 43616; (TS-GP 3) JCSM-523-66 to SecDef, 19 Aug 66; JMF 9155.2 (15 Jul 66). (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 6018 to CINCPAC, 16 Jul 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 66.

22. (TS) Msg, Vientiane 340 to State, 19 Jul 66, JCS IN 94700.

23. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-523-66 to SecDef, 19 Aug 66, JMF 9155.2 (15 Jul 66).

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would meet such allegations with "no comment or confirmation." In addition, each B-52 strike would be accompanied by a cover strike in RVN.²⁴

After meeting with Ambassador Sullivan on 15 September, the Prime Minister approved the eight ARC LIGHT strikes, but with two conditions: first, he insisted that the bombings be accurate and there be no mistakes; second, the United States would say nothing regarding the strikes. No mention would even be made to anyone in the RLG. Ambassador Sullivan interpreted the second stipulation as a test to see if the United States could control security leaks, and he expressed his belief that permission to conduct future ARC LIGHT operations would depend on the US ability to comply with the Prime Minister's requirements.²⁵

Operations In and Near the DMZ

In 1965 US authorities had recognized the threat posed by enemy violation of the DMZ and had considered possible counteractions. In September 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had sought authority for attack of targets in both the northern and southern portions of the DMZ by "all appropriate military means," but the State Department had opposed such action and the matter had been shelved.²⁶

In March 1966, COMUSMACV reported confirmed evidence of enemy use of infiltration routes in the western portion of the DMZ and requested authority for air strikes in this area. CINCPAC concurred with this request, stating that the enemy

24. (TS-GP 3) Jt State-Def Msg 45705 to Vientiane, 13 Sep 66, JCS IN 1063.

25. (TS) Msg, Vientiane 1581 to State, 16 Sep 66, JCS IN 15967.

26. (S-GP 4) Memo, Dir, Far East Region, OASD(ISA) to D/JS, 1 Sep 65, Encl to JCS 2343/676, 2 Sep 65; (S-GP 3) JCSM-702-65 to SecDef, 20 Sep 65 (derived from JCS 2343/676-1); (TS-GP 3) Ltr, DepAsstSecState for FE Affairs to ASD(ISA), 2 Dec 65, Encl to JCS 2343/676-3, 7 Jun 66, JMF-9155.3 (23 Jul 65).

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had now a sanctuary in the DMZ that should be denied. Subsequently, the Director, Joint Staff, informed the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) of "the strong probability" that the extreme western portion of the DMZ was being used for infiltration into RVN. The Director requested action to resolve State-Defense differences over the conduct of air operations in the DMZ so that appropriate instructions could be dispatched to CINCPAC and Ambassador Lodge.²⁷

Representatives of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) discussed the matter with State Department officials, who indicated that tactical air strikes against infiltration routes in the DMZ might be compatible with current US policy provided the following conditions could be established: 1) concrete evidence of NVN use of the DMZ for infiltration in order to assure that US strikes could "reasonably and justifiably" be described as counteractions in response to NVN violations of the DMZ; 2) an adequate record of GVN protests to the ICC regarding NVN violations of the DMZ; 3) preparation of appropriate public affairs guidance in advance of the execution of contemplated military actions. Consequently, the Director, Far East Region (ISA) suggested to the Director, Joint Staff, that, when "firm military intelligence" was available, specific strike proposals be submitted to the Secretary of Defense for State Department and White House clearance.²⁸

Such evidence was quickly forthcoming. In June, intelligence sources reported the movement of a NVA division across the DMZ into Quang Tri Province. This movement was followed by the deployment of NVN division-sized units "to the area of the DMZ." COMUSMACV informed CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff of this buildup on 13 July 1966 and requested authority for tactical air strikes against targets in the DMZ "in its entirety." To counter the increased enemy threat, COMUSMACV planned operations in the immediate vicinity of the DMZ. Since his troops might be subjected to enemy fire emanating from the DMZ, COMUSMACV intended, unless instructed to the contrary, to authorize return fire and maneuver into the DMZ for the purpose of self-defense. CINCPAC supported General

27. (~~S~~GP 3) DJSM-506-66 to OASD(ISA), 21 Apr 66, Encl to JCS 2343/676-2, 22 Apr 66, JMF 9155.3 (23 Jul 65).
(~~S~~GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 17 Mar 66, JCS IN 64994.
(~~S~~GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to COMUSMACV, 19 Mar 66, JCS IN 69320.
28. (~~TS~~GP 3) Memo, Dir, Far East Region, OASD(ISA) to D/JS, 1 Jun 66, Encl to JCS 2343/676-3, 7 Jun 66, JMF 9155.3 (23 Jul 65).

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Westmoreland's assessment of the situation and recommended to the Joint Chiefs of Staff the authorization of air operations and artillery fire against identified military activity in the DMZ. The US Embassy in Saigon had already advised Washington that GVN protests to the ICC of alleged DMZ violations by NVN numbered in the hundreds. Thus the State Department conditions for military operations in the DMZ, with the exception of the preparation of public affairs guidance, had now been fulfilled.²⁹

On 20 July 1966, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with the approval of the Secretary of Defense and with State Department concurrence, authorized CINCPAC to conduct "air strikes in the DMZ, and artillery fire (land and naval) into that portion of the DMZ south of the line of demarcation," against clearly defined military activity. Ten days later the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized US/Free World forces to maneuver into the DMZ south of the Demarcation Line when in contact with VC/NVA forces, or when engagement was imminent, if necessary for preservation of friendly forces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff specified that US/Free World forces would not advance north of the Demarcation Line, and would withdraw from the DMZ once contact with the enemy was broken. The authorization for operations in the DMZ also allowed for RVNAF participation in the southern part of the DMZ on the same basis as US/Free World forces, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff instructed CINCPAC that US military personnel should make every effort to assure that RVNAF operations in or near the DMZ observed the limitations applied to US/Free World forces.³⁰

In a further attempt to counter the increased enemy infiltration through the DMZ and the buildup just north of the DMZ COMUSMACV began Operation TALLY HO on 20 July--a program of air strikes and reconnaissance in an extended battle area north of the DMZ, intended to disrupt and block the flow of men and supplies from NVN to the South.

29. ~~(TS-NOFORN-GP 1)~~ COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 25. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 13 Jul 66, JCS IN 85166. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 18 Jul 66, JCS IN 92786. (S) Msg, Saigon 5537 to State, 15 Jun 66; JCS IN 38916.
30. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7184 to CINCPAC, 20 Jul 66, JMF 9155.3 (13 Jul 66). (TS-GP 3) Msgs, JCS 7991 and 7992 to CINCPAC, 30 Jul 66. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 8550 to CINCPAC, 6 Aug 66. ~~(TS-NOFORN-GP 1)~~ COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 355.

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During the latter part of July and early August, B-52s supported group operations (HASTINGS/PRAIRIE) in RVN near the DMZ. On 28 July, COMUSMACV requested approval of three strikes against infiltration routes located between 12 and 14 miles north of the DMZ in NVN.³¹

On 21 August, before COMUSMACV received authority for these three strikes, General Westmoreland requested approval of nine additional strikes against targets located near the southern edge of NVN and within the DMZ to "disrupt the enemy's attempts to mass and maintain supply areas for a possible offensive against Quang Tri Province."³²

On 2 September, more than a month after COMUSMACV's request for B-52 strikes against infiltration routes in southern NVN, the Department of State objected to the proposal to strike the first three targets because "at this time such action would be regarded in many circles and the press as escalation and possibly even a misinterpretation as a softening up for more direct military action on the ground." The State Department explained that such operations would probably work against current GVN efforts to persuade the ICC to investigate NVN's use of the DMZ. However, the State Department would reconsider the matter if intelligence established positive lucrative targets beyond the capability of tactical aircraft.³³

The Secretary of Defense informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 7 September that "in consideration of the views of the Secretary of State . . . I desire that no B-52 strikes be conducted against targets in North Vietnam or the DMZ north of the Demarcation Line." He said, however, that he would be willing to consider, on an urgent basis, any "specific strike proposals which might be warranted by military developments of a highly critical nature." He offered to

31. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to AIG 7041, 28 Jul 66, JCS IN 19452; (S-GP 3) Memo, J-3 to JCS, "Employment of ARC LIGHT Force (U)," 17 Aug 66; JMF 9155.3 (28 Jul 66). See Ch.

32. (S-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 29148 to AIG 7041, 21 Aug 66, JCS IN 60384, JMF 9155.3 (21 Aug 66).

33. (UNK) Memo, AsstSecState for FE Affairs, to RADM Lemos, OSD/ISA, "ARC LIGHT Strikes in North Viet-Nam," 2 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.

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arrange for General Wheeler to discuss the problem with the President if the Chairman felt it was necessary.³⁴

The Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC and COMUSMACV of this decision on 8 September. General Wheeler asked the two commanders to send to the Joint Chiefs of Staff any urgent and critical requirements for ARC LIGHT missions in NVN and the northern part of the DMZ as soon as possible. He said he would take the matter before the President as had been proposed by the Secretary of Defense if circumstances warranted.³⁵

On 13 September, General Westmoreland re-emphasized the growing threat presented by the NVN troop buildup in Quang Tri Province. In a cable to CINCPAC, he stated that the "enemy's buildup, disposition of forces, forward stockage of supplies, AA weapon systems being deployed southward and depth of patrol penetrations indicate by all accepted standards that the enemy is developing an offensive as opposed to a defensive posture."

Intelligence sources had verified that the NVN was trucking supplies up to the Demarcation Line and then moving the goods south by porter, bicycle, and animals over a well-worn trail network. The point at which the material was transferred was well camouflaged by jungle canopy. Westmoreland asked that ARC LIGHT strikes against this transfer point be approved to allow the clearing of the canopy so that tactical aircraft could then attack specific targets within the cleared zone. He believed that the target could be described as a "highly critical" one and that it satisfied the Secretary of Defense's requirements.³⁶ Late that evening the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the ARC LIGHT attack against the transfer area. The

34. (S) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "Use of ARC LIGHT Forces," 7 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.

35. (TS-GP-3) Msg, JCS 2105 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 8 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66. (TS) Msg, JCS 5333-66 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 8 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.

36. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV 41191 To CINCPAC, 13 Sep 66, JCS IN 99085, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.

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strike, which straddled the Demarcation Line, was carried out on 16 September. ³⁷

This strike took care of only one of the nine B-52 targets he had requested authority to strike on 21 August. On 17 September, he asked to bomb the remaining eight because of their "highly critical nature."³⁸ Three of the remaining eight were approved for execution on that same day.³⁹

Additional strikes were conducted north of the DMZ and within its boundaries, throughout 1966. Of the 68 targets recommended by COMUSMACV in the last month of the year, 6 were in the DMZ and 4 in NVN.⁴⁰

The decision to launch ARC LIGHT forces against enemy targets in the area of the DMZ and the southern part of NVN brought with it the danger that NVN would deploy SAMs within range of the relatively unmaneuverable B-52s. Evidence that the SAMs were being positioned close to the DMZ was discovered late in September 1966, when B-52 crews reported that efforts were being made to track them and that they were receiving signals from the radars used by SA-2 missile systems.⁴¹

On 10 October, a SAM installation was observed about 12-15 miles northeast of Dong Hoi. The site was attacked by tactical aircraft two days later.⁴²

The possibility that the SA-2s were being moved toward the DMZ heightened on 18 October when two pilots reported

37. (~~S~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2554 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 13 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 16 Sep 66, JCS IN 15561, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, p. 581.

38. (~~TS~~-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV 41856 to CINCPAC, 17 Sep 66, JCS IN 17771.

39. (~~S~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2979 to CINCPAC and CINCSAC, 17 Sep 66.

40. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, p. 581.

41. (~~TS NOFORN~~ except Canada-RD-GP 1) SAC History, 1966, p. 256.

42. (~~S NOFORN~~) DIA IB 203-66, 19 Oct 66, p. A-4.

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observing what they believed to be a missile in flight approximately 16 miles north of the 17th Parallel. It was suspected that the installation could have been located six to eight miles north of the DMZ.⁴³

The following day, ARC LIGHT forces were to conduct a mission, LIGHT SIGHT, in the vicinity of the suspected site. Although CINCPAC assured the Joint Chiefs of Staff that adequate measures were being taken to preclude the possibility of a B-52 shootdown, the Joint Chiefs of Staff disapproved execution of LIGHT SIGHT. Explaining their decision, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated, "considering the world-wide publicity which would result from the loss of a B-52 to SAM action . . . this strike should not be undertaken prior to 2 November 1966." During December, other B-52 raids were authorized against targets within and north of the DMZ because intelligence sources concluded that either the SAM installation had been reported erroneously or it had been moved.⁴⁴

In early September, CINCPAC sought permission to conduct "SHINING BRASS type (ground) reconnaissance" in the area north of the DMZ to a depth of 20 km. This reconnaissance could identify and direct air strikes against enemy infiltration targets in the area above the DMZ. Washington, however, disapproved the request. In response to a further request by CINCPAC, the Joint Chiefs of Staff asked the Secretary of Defense in a memorandum on 20 October 1966 to approve the operation of US-advised reconnaissance teams in the southern half of the DMZ and of all-indigenous reconnaissance teams supported by US-manned helicopters in the northern half of the DMZ and into NVN to a depth of 20 km. The Joint

43. ~~(S NOFORN)~~ DIA IB 191-66, 20 Oct 66, p. A-4.
(~~S~~-GP 3) Msg, COMUSMACV 46395 to CINCPAC, 20 Oct 66, JCS IN 77260.

44. (~~S~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5877 to CINCPAC, 19 Oct 66.
(~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6143 to CINCPAC, CINCSAC, and COMUSMACV, 21 Oct 66, JMF 9155.3 (21 Oct 66). (~~TS NOFORN~~ except Canada-RD-GP 1) SAC History, 1966, p. 256.

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Chiefs of Staff recognized the political risks of such action, but considered them outweighed by the critical need for "hard intelligence" of the area. They informed the Secretary of Defense that ground reconnaissance teams could not only verify intelligence obtained by technical means, but could take immediate action to direct air strikes against appropriate targets. The Joint Chiefs of Staff added that "relatively few" US troops would actually be committed to these operations and those only in a supporting role "with no US personnel . . . committed into NVN in a ground role." Such reconnaissance missions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff said, would represent only an extension of the type of operations currently authorized for OPLAN 34A and USAF SAR helicopters.⁴⁵

This request apparently became the subject of lengthy debate at the State-Defense level, and a decision was not reached until late January 1967. The State Department objected to the operation of reconnaissance teams north of the Demarcation Line and, as a result, on 28 January 1967 the Deputy Secretary of Defense approved only the conduct of "ground reconnaissance operations with US-advised teams in the DMZ south of the Demarcation Line."⁴⁶

Despite the US air strikes in the DMZ, artillery fire into the southern portion of the DMZ, and air operations just north of the DMZ, the VC/NVA forces continued to operate in the area. By November, there were indications of numerous fortifications and antiaircraft positions within the DMZ, and in one day, 11 November 1966, antiaircraft fire from the DMZ destroyed four US aircraft. Intelligence confirmed that the enemy had the potential of constructing additional land artillery emplacements just north of the DMZ, which could fire on US and ARVN forces south of the DMZ. In a memorandum of 29 November the Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out to the Secretary of Defense that the restriction of artillery fire (land and naval) to the southern portion of the DMZ had allowed enemy forces to improve field fortifications, particularly antiaircraft positions, and had made it "extremely hazardous" for forward air control aircraft to operate in areas north of the DMZ. The Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that the enemy was aware of these restrictions and was taking ..

45. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-675-66 to SecDef, 20 Oct 66 (derived from JCS 2343/929), JMF 9155 (10 Oct 66).

46. (TS-GP 1) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 28 Jan 67, Encl to JCS 2343/292-1, 31 Jan 67, same file.

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advantage of them, together with the cover of bad weather, to develop additional positions north of the Demarcation Line. They requested authority to employ artillery and naval gunfire against clearly defined military activity in NVN territory north of the Demarcation Line, including the TALLY HO area south and east of the Dai Gang River.⁴⁷

The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) was prepared to support the JCS proposal, subject to the concurrence of the Department of State, but at the year's end, there had been no reply from State.⁴⁸

In 1966, another possibility considered for inhibiting enemy use of the DMZ, especially infiltration routes through the zone, was defoliation. Defoliation had been practiced in RVN and Laos since 1961, and approximately 630,000 acres had been defoliated. Defoliation operations had evolved to a routine stage and the defoliants used were not harmful to human or animal life. Defoliation in the DMZ would remove the dense vegetation there, exposing enemy activity and permitting more effective countermeasures.⁴⁹

In August 1966, COMUSMACV suggested to Ambassador Lodge defoliation in the southern half of the DMZ. Lodge recognized the military advantages of such an operation, but he feared that, inadvertently, the northern part of the DMZ might be sprayed, resulting in NVN charges of chemical warfare. As an alternative, General Westmoreland suggested the defoliation of a large area just south of the DMZ, and Ambassador Lodge found this acceptable.⁵⁰

Both the State Department and Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) supported the alternate defoliation proposal, but CINCPAC and the Joint Chiefs of Staff favored COMUSMACV's original suggestion. The Joint Chiefs of Staff

47. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-736-66 to SecDef, 29 Nov 66 (derived from JCS 2343/964), JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).

48. (TS-GP 3) Memo, OASD(ISA) to DepAsstSecState for FE Affairs, 1 Dec 66, Encl to JCS 2343/964-1, 29 Dec 66; (TS-GP 3) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 4 Feb 67; JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).

49. (S-GP 4) JCS 2343/910, 17 Sep 66, JMF 9155 (16 Aug 66).

50. (S) Msg, Saigon 3601 to State, 16 Aug 66, JCS IN 51790, same file.

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informed the Secretary of Defense on 22 September that current defoliation guidelines were adequate to minimize adverse political effects, and they requested that he obtain State Department approval for defoliation operations in the southern half of the DMZ. The Chairman suggested to the Secretary of Defense that the proposal might be presented to the State Department as an action that would assist the ICC as well as COMUSMACV.⁵¹

The Secretary of Defense accepted the JCS proposal and requested the Secretary of State on 4 October to concur. The Secretary of Defense assured Secretary Rusk such defoliation had political as well as definite military advantages, were defensive in nature, and would assist the ICC.⁵²

On 18 November, the Secretary of State gave his concurrence. While the Secretary of State could foresee some unfavorable political reaction to these operations, he believed the reaction could be managed so long as defoliation of any area of NVN was avoided. In implementation of this agreement, the Departments of State and Defense jointly authorized the conduct of defoliation operations within the southern portion of the DMZ, subject to positive control to prevent inadvertent spraying north of the Provisional Military Demarcation Line. The actual defoliation did not begin until 5 February 1967.⁵³

Meanwhile, on 4 October, Ambassador Lodge and General Westmoreland had sought Washington consideration of a COMUSMACV proposal for defoliation of the northern portion of the DMZ and specified infiltration routes in NVN. Again the Joint Chiefs of Staff supported COMUSMACV. They informed the Secretary of Defense on 10 November that the proposed

51. (S-GP 3) JCSM-603-66 to SecDef, 22 Sep 66 (derived from JCS 2343/910); (S-GP 4) CM-1772-66 to SecDef, 22 Sep 66; same file.

52. (S-GP 4) Ltr, SecDef to SecState, 4 Oct 66, Encl to JCS 2343/910-1, 10 Oct 66, same file.

53. (S-GP 3) Ltr, SecState to SecDef, 18 Nov 66, Att to Encl to JCS 2343/910-3, 8 Dec 66; (S-GP 3) Jt State-Def Msg, (State 91707) to Saigon and JCS, 28 Nov 66, JCS IN 54955; (S-GP 4) DJSM-196-67 to ASD(ISA), 13 Feb 67, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/910-3, 16 Feb 67; same file.

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defoliation would aid visual and photographic detection of movement, thereby improving all other military operations aimed at restricting enemy use of the DMZ.⁵⁴

In light of Secretary Rusk's views on limiting defoliation to the area south of the Demarcation Line, the Secretary of Defense deferred action on any expansion of defoliation in the DMZ, pending evaluation of the military and political consequences of the currently authorized operations.⁵⁵

The Anti-infiltration Barrier

Another possible method of impeding the infiltration of men and material, in addition to authorized military operations, was the construction of a defensive barrier along the 17th Parallel in RVN and Laos. Washington officials had considered the idea of a barrier in the vicinity of the DMZ in 1965, but discarded it as militarily infeasible, and as a "visible, fixed, long-term" violation of the 1962 Geneva Accords.⁵⁶

The Secretary of Defense raised the question of a barrier again in the Spring of 1966. In late March, he requested the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to assess the requirement to establish "an iron-curtain counter-infiltration barrier across northern South Vietnam and Laos from the South China Sea to Thailand." The Secretary of Defense requested the Chairman to determine the effectiveness and engineering feasibility of such a barrier, the time required for construction, and the requirements for construction units and for men, materials, equipment, and weapons to man the barrier, without weighing dollar costs or the political aspects.⁵⁷

54. (S) Jt Emb-MACV Msg, (Saigon 7583) to State, 4 Oct 68, JCS IN 46905. (S-GP 3) JCSM-711-66 to SecDef, 10 Nov 66 (derived from JCS 2343/910-2), JMF 9155 (16 Aug 66).

55. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 5 Dec 66, Encl to JCS 2343/910-3, 8 Dec 66, same file.

56. (TS-GP 1) J-3 TP-58-65 for CJCS, 8 Nov 65, JMF 9155 (8 Nov 65).

57. (TS-GP 4) CM-1286-66 to SecDef, 22 Mar 66, Encl to JCS 2339/222, 24 Mar 66, same file.

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The Chairman forwarded to the Secretary of Defense on 18 April 1966 a counterinfiltration barrier study prepared by the Joint Staff. The study described a 500-meter cleared and mined strip, bounded by two barbed wire entanglements. At the rear edge of this strip would be a chain-link electrified fence with watchtowers or bunkers and lighting for night observation. The barrier would employ a variety of detection devices and booby traps, and would be emplaced along the north side of Route 9 for a total length of 225 miles; the study also called for another barrier (about 120 miles) on the south side of Route 9 in order to protect the troops guarding the main barrier from rear attack. The Joint Staff estimated that, overall, the establishment of such a barrier would require: from two to four years for completion, including assembly and deployment of forces; approximately 206,000 tons of construction materials; 271 engineer battalion months for construction; and a minimum of three US divisions for manning purposes.⁵⁸

The Joint Staff doubted that a barrier would be effective or worth the cost in terms of men and materials. The study pointed out that a barrier could only stop large-scale infiltration, not small groups. The Joint Staff also believed that, with the erection of a barrier, the enemy would increase his infiltration by sea and through Cambodia. COMUSMACV, COMUSMACTHAI, CINCPAC, and CINCPAC's component commanders all opposed the fixed barrier concept, and the Joint Staff study concluded that the large forces required to construct and maintain a barrier would cause a dangerous diversion of forces from current missions. According to the study additional forces, if made available, could be employed to better advantage under concepts previously recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Joint Staff recommended that a barrier system not be undertaken, and in submitting the study to the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman supported this recommendation.⁵⁹

In the summer of 1966, the JASON Division of the Institute for Defense Analyses studied several subjects related to the war in Vietnam, including the feasibility of an anti-infiltration barrier. The JASON Summer Study, forwarded to the Secretary of Defense on 30 August 1966,

58. (CS-GP 4) CM-1353-66 to SecDef, 18 Apr 66, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2339/222, 20 Apr 66, same file.

59. Ibid.

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contained a concept for an air-supported anti-infiltration barrier. The concept provided for a barrier with two "somewhat different parts"--one against foot traffic and one against vehicles. The preferred location for the antipersonnel portion was the region along the southern edge of the DMZ to the Laotian border and then north of Tchepone to the vicinity of Muong Sen. This area was virtually unpopulated and its terrain was rugged. The location for the anti-vehicular part of the system was an area in Laos, "about 100 by 40 kilometers." The road network there tended to be more constricted than elsewhere and there was a smaller area available for new roads. The study considered this concept not very different from previous barrier proposals. New aspects reflected in the JASON Study included: "the very large scale of area denial," especially mine fields kilometers deep rather than the conventional 100-200 meters; the large numbers and persistent employment of weapons, sensors, and aircraft sorties in the barrier area; and the emphasis on rapid and carefully planned incorporation of more effective weapons and sensors into the system.⁶⁰

The antipersonnel system of the barrier concept would encompass a constantly renewed minefield of nonsterilizing gravel (and possibly button bomblets) distributed in patterns covering interconnected valleys and slopes along the entire barrier (the actual mined area would be equivalent of a strip 100 by 5 km). There would also be a pattern of acoustic detectors to listen for attempted penetrations as indicated by mine explosions. The antivehicular system would consist of acoustic detectors distributed every mile or so along trackable roads in the interdicted area, monitored 24 hours a day by patrol aircraft. Vectored strike aircraft using SADEYE (bomb clusters) would respond to signals of truck or truck convoy movement. Patrol aircraft would distribute self-sterilizing gravel over parts of the road net at dusk (the self-sterilizing feature was needed so that road-watching and mine-planting teams could be used in this area) and reconnaissance aircraft would cover the entire area each few days.⁶¹

The authors of the JASON Summer Study believed that construction of such a barrier could be initiated using currently available or "nearly available" components, with some

60. (15-GP 1) Memo, IDA to SecDef, "JASON Summer Study," 30 Aug 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

61. Ibid.

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necessary modifications, and could be installed within "a year or so" from go-ahead at an estimated cost of \$800 million per year. Although recognizing that countermeasures to the barrier system would be found, they stated that it would take some time to bring these countermeasures into operations. The study recommended the establishment of a task force to carry out detailed design and planning of a barrier, to experiment with and decide on modifications of present components, and to design and accelerate development of modified and new components to be fed into the barrier. The study also proposed that, after a few months, and if the prospects still appeared promising, the task force could be merged into a task force charged with helping the operating forces implement the system.⁶²

The Secretary of Defense was favorably impressed with the barrier concept of the JASON Summer Study, and on 3 September he forwarded the concept, though not the entire study, to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He believed that the proposal had "sufficient merit to warrant a decision that we will accept the plan or some modification thereof in principle and install it at the earliest practicable date." He requested the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and asked that they be prepared in consultation with CINCPAC and COMUSMACV. If the Joint Chiefs of Staff concurred in his proposal, said the Secretary, he would form an organization to expedite plans and supervise the several concerned DOD components.⁶³

The Secretary of Defense did not await the reply of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to begin action on the barrier. On 15 September, he established Joint Task Force (JTF) 728 (unclassified designation: Defense Communications Planning Group) "to achieve the objective of having" an infiltration interdiction system "to stop (or at the minimum substantially reduce) the flow of men and supplies from North to South Vietnam." The Secretary of Defense directed that the system be designed, produced and put into place in RVN and Laos by 15 September 1967. The Secretary named Lieutenant General Alfred D. Starbird as Director of JTF 728, authorizing General Starbird to report directly to him and to have direct contact

⁶². Ibid.

⁶³. (IS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 3 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/898, 6 Sep 66, JMF 9155/3330 (3 Sep 66)*sec 1.

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with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the military services. The Secretary of Defense assigned the project the unclassified name PRACTICE NINE.⁶⁴

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were obviously not enthusiastic about the barrier concept. In a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense on 17 September, they stated that they would concur with the concept so long as the barrier was in addition to, and not a substitute for, "any major US or Free World military effort" in Vietnam. They stated that logistical support for the barrier should be large enough to preclude the diversion of critical munitions and strike forces from other combat operations. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized the "historic use of barriers and the potential inherent in this concept," but they shared with CINCPAC a concern over its "practicality." Although they considered the 15 September 1967 operational date given General Starbird optimistic, they admitted that the concept might have "the potential of shortening the war and that proceeding in the manner directed will provide a quick determination of validity and accelerated development of the associated hardware."⁶⁵

JTF 728 proceeded with its task at once. On 29 September, General Starbird provided the Secretary of Defense with a preliminary report, including a draft program with initial estimates of personnel, equipment, and facilities for achieving and maintaining barrier capability. Several weeks later, after a further refinement of requirements, General Starbird requested and the Secretary of Defense approved immediate funding authorization for certain research and development and production activities.⁶⁶

64. (S) Memo, SecDef to LGEN Starbird, Dir, JTF 728, 15 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/907, 15 Sep 66, same file, same sec.

65. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-594-66 to SecDef, 17 Sep 66 (derived from JCS 2343/898-2), same file, same sec.

66. (TS-GP 3) JTF 728, "Report to the Secretary of Defense on Schedules and Requirements for the Project of JTF 728 (S)," 29 Sep 66, same file, sec 2. (TS-GP 3) Memo, Dir, JTF 728, to SecDef, 16 Oct 66, Encl to JCS 2343/907-6, 17 Oct 66; (TS) Memo, ASD(A) to DDR&E et al., 19 Oct 66, Encl to JCS 2343/907-9, 25 Oct 66; same file, sec 3.

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These actions gave the Joint Chiefs of Staff concern. In a memorandum of 10 October 1966, they informed the Secretary of Defense that the JTG 728 draft program would hamper current combat programs by committing critical resources "without prerequisite determination of practicality." They recommended to the Secretary a modification in the JTF 728 terms of reference to require determination of feasibility prior to commitment of resources, to allow adjustment in the initial operational date, and to provide that the JTF project definition plan be submitted to the Secretary of Defense through the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Secretary of Defense agreed with the Joint Chiefs of Staff concerning the feasibility of the barrier project before commitment of resources "to the extent it applies to feasibility of components of the interdiction system (munitions, sensors, aircraft modifications, etc.)." Also Mr. McNamara instructed General Starbird to make his reports, including the project definition, available to the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the same time they were submitted to him.⁶⁷

Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff were concerned that Secretary McNamara's approval of the JTF 728 request would divert essential weapons and materials from current programs, they decided to reserve their views for the overall consideration that would be given JTF 728's project definition plan in November.⁶⁸

Meanwhile, during a visit by the Secretary of Defense to RVN in October, COMUSMACV suggested an alternate barrier plan. The COMUSMACV proposal included: "a physical barrier, in the traditional sense, on the eastern end of the line where the country is relatively flat and open . . . ; secondly, an extension to the northwest from the Laos-South Vietnam border, which would be laid by air and policed by air"; and a "center section through the mountains to the east of the Laos-South Vietnam border" consisting of a series of physical obstructions in the mountain passes. At the Secretary's request, General Westmoreland refined his proposal into a requirements plan

67. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-652-66 to SecDef, 10 Oct 66 (derived from JCS 2343/907-2), same file, sec 2. (TS) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 25 Oct 66, Encl to JCS 2343/907-10, 28 Oct 66, same file, sec 3.

68. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/907-11, 31 Oct 66, same file, sec 3.

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that he submitted on 25 October. General Westmoreland's plan assumed that additional forces, over and above COMUSMACV's operational force requirements, would be provided for the barrier construction and manning. But, because of the strength ceilings imposed by Program #4, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC and COMUSMACV on 18 November 1966 that additional forces could not be made available to meet the requirements of the barrier plan. The Joint Chiefs of Staff added that COMUSMACV should plan to meet all PRACTICE NINE requirements from within approved in-country strengths. Subsequently, both COMUSMACV and CINCPAC expressed disagreement with this decision.⁶⁹

On 14 November 1966, General Starbird submitted his Project Definition Report to the Secretary of Defense. In his report, he analyzed four approaches to a barrier system: the Prescribed Plan, a modified version of the JASON Summer Study concept providing for the installation of a ground-emplaced linear barrier south of the DMZ "on the 30 km adjacent to the coast" and an air-emplaced antipersonnel barrier from the linear barrier westward into Laos and an antivehicular barrier in the Laos area; COMUSMACV's barrier plan; and two alternate proposals that were phased composites of the Prescribed and MACV Plans. The first alternate, titled the Phased Installation Plan (PIP), called for the installation of a ground-emplaced linear barrier from the RVN coast to the Laos border similar in nature and timing to the MACV proposal. In Laos, the PIP provided for the installation of the "originally conceived" air-supported antivehicular portion by 1 November 1967 and the antipersonnel portion by 1 April 1968. The second alternate, the Phased Installation Plan (Modified) was the same as the PIP, except that both the antivehicular and antipersonnel portions would be installed by 1 November 1967.⁷⁰

69. (TS-GP 3) CM-1845-66 to Secy, JCS, 17 Oct 66, Encl to JCS 2343/907-7, 19 Oct 66, same file, sec 3. (TS-GP 3)
Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 21 Oct 66, JCS IN 78800. (TS-GP 3)
Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 25 Oct 66, JCS IN 89093. (TS-GP 4)
Msg, JCS 8228 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 18 Nov 66. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, pp. 1073-1075.

70. (TS-GP 3) Memo, Dir, JTF 728, to SecDef, 14 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/907-14, 15 Nov 66, JMF 9155/3330 (3 Sep 66) secs 4 and 4A.

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After reviewing and comparing the requirements of the four proposals in terms of personnel, major equipment, facilities, construction, and unprogrammed funding, General Starbird recommended that barrier preparations proceed on the basis of the Phased Installation Plan. The Secretary of Defense, however, requested JCS views on any increases in programmed forces required to execute the Phase Installation Plan (Modified) and any other comments or recommendations they wished to make.⁷¹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff took advantage of the opportunity afforded them to express again their dissatisfaction with the whole barrier concept. In a memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, dated 1 December 1966, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended that the plan not be approved for execution and, instead, that current efforts to reduce infiltration be continued and expanded. The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the forces required to form the barrier could not be realized either from Program #4 forces without jeopardizing existing programs or from out-of-country sources because of equipment and sustaining base limitations. They considered the technical and operational feasibility of the plan open to question and the estimated piaster cost of the plan dangerous to the already critical inflation in RVN. They believed that the division of effort and increased costs of the barrier would not produce benefits commensurate with the resultant loss of military initiative and momentum in current programs.⁷²

After considering the JTF 728 Project Definition Plan and the subsequent JCS comments, the Secretary of Defense directed General Starbird to prepare a revised barrier plan that would minimize the impact on other Southeast Asia missions and that would require only minimum additional forces from the CONUS. General Starbird submitted the revised plan, entitled "Plan for Increased Anti-Infiltration Capability for SEA (S)," on 22 December. It provided for materials for the linear portion of the barrier to be procured and in-country by 1 July 1967, but without a commitment for deployment. Aircraft and other resources unique to the air-supported portion of the barrier were to be developed and prepared on a schedule to permit

71. Ibid. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 15 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/907-16, 17 Nov 66, same file, sec 4.

72. (TS-GP 1) JCSM-740-66 to SecDef, 1 Dec 66 (derived from JCS 2343/907-24), same file, sec 5.

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operational availability in-theater by 1 November 1967--again without a decision for deployment. The 22 December plan also provided for the Joint Chiefs of Staff to task COMUSMACV and CINCPAC for the preparation of plans for the interdiction of infiltration through the conventional linear barrier area by 10 February 1967 and for interdiction in the area west of the linear barrier, including both a "defile" barrier area in RVN and an air-supported barrier area in Laos, by 15 April 1967. The revised plan called for Secretary of Defense decision-points to be 25 February 1967 for the linear barrier and 15 July 1967 for the air-supported barrier, with both keyed to an IOC-option date of 1 November 1967. Requests for "minimum essential augmentation forces" beyond currently programmed forces were to be submitted to the Secretary of Defense.⁷³

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were still dissatisfied with the barrier plan. At a meeting on 6 January 1967, they re-affirmed their opposition to an anti-infiltration barrier until plans could be properly evaluated. They stated that, if the Secretary of Defense had decided to construct a barrier, then they would proceed as directed, but since he had not made such a decision, they wished their concern to be understood. Rather than be "aggravating" by lengthy repetitions of their position, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in a memorandum of 9 January 1967, merely called the Secretary's attention to their views on the barrier, as stated on 1 December. They also requested certain minor revisions in the 22 December Anti-Infiltration Capability Plan. Apparently the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not expect Secretary McNamara to reverse his support for the barrier for they had already instructed COMUSMACV and CINCPAC to prepare the anti-infiltration interdiction plans responsive to the 22 December plan.⁷⁴

The JCS expectation proved correct. For on the same day that they forwarded their latest comments, the Secretary of

73. (TS-GP 3) Memo, Dir, JTF 728, to SecDef, "Plan for Increased Anti-Infiltration Capability for SEA (S)," 22 Dec 66, same file, sec 7. (TS-GP 3) Talking Paper for CJCS, same subj, 30 Dec 66, same file, same sec.

74. (TS) Note to Control Div., "JCS 2343/907-28 - Plan for Increased Anti-Infiltration Capability for SEA (S)," 6 Jan 67, same file, sec 7. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-11-67 to SecDef, 9 Jan 67 (derived from JCS 2343/907-34), same file, sec 8. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 2986 to CINCPAC, 6 Jan 67, same file, same sec.

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Defense directed General Starbird to prepare an anti-infiltration capability in accordance with the 22 December plan. He did, however, request General Starbird to make the minor changes that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had requested.⁷⁵

As if to underscore the importance that the Secretary of Defense attached to the barrier project, the Deputy Secretary of Defense requested and the President approved on 13 January 1967 the designation of project PRACTICE NINE "as being in the highest national priority category." After nearly a year of planning and debate, the United States was fully committed to the construction of an anti-infiltration barrier in South Vietnam.⁷⁶

75. (S-GP 3) Memo, SecDef to Dir, DCPG, 9 Jan 67, Encl to JCS 2343/907-35, 11 Jan 67, same file, same sec.

76. (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to Pres, 7 Jan 67, Encl to JCS 1725/644, 10 Jan 67; (S-GP 4) NSAM No. 358, 13 Jan 67, Encl to JCS 1725/644-3, 29 Mar 67; JMF 418 (7 Jan 67).

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Chapter 36

OPERATIONS AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM, JULY 1966-JANUARY 1967

The authority to attack the Hanoi/Haiphong POL had been granted only after repeated argument and recommendation by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They had welcomed this expanded authority, hoping that it would lead to further relaxation of the curbs on ROLLING THUNDER. But the bombing of targets close to two enemy population centers evoked loud protests and charges of escalation, not only from the communists, but also from neutrals and a growing number of voluble opponents of the national policy at home. These outcries disquieted some of the President's advisors and contributed to the delay or denial of increased authority for air operations against NVN during the next several months. Also serving to inhibit ROLLING THUNDER were certain current assessments of the effects of the bombing on NVN which tended to deprecate its effectiveness and value.

RT 51

RT 51, which became effective on 6 July 1966 and on which no time limit was set, called for a "concentrated effort" to destroy NVN POL systems, including dispersed facilities. Four bridges, three of them within the Hanoi circle, were assigned as fixed targets. The armed reconnaissance area was expanded to include all of NVN except a buffer zone 25 nm from the Chinese border and the sanctuaries around Hanoi and Haiphong. All JCS targets previously assigned in ROLLING THUNDER packages could be struck except locks, dams, two Army barracks, and the POL storage facilities at Hanoi and Haiphong. IRON HAND operations were authorized throughout the armed reconnaissance area without photographic confirmation. Ten days later the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized Admiral Sharp to fly BLUE TREE reconnaissance over all NVN with the exception of a buffer zone 20 nm from the Chinese border.¹

1. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6008 to CINCPAC, 6 Jul 66.
(TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 6904 to CINCPAC, 16 Jul 66.

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CINCPAC's Progress Against POL

After seeing CINCPAC's early reports of RT 51 strikes, General Wheeler informed Admiral Sharp that he was concerned that so few POL targets had been bombed. Daily reports sent to the White House and to the Secretary of Defense had shown little progress in reducing enemy facilities. General Wheeler feared that higher authority might order a specific daily level of effort against POL. "Such an order," he advised CINCPAC, "would be regrettable." He suggested that CINCPAC step up the POL campaign and submit as soon as feasible a "POL strangulation" plan.²

Admiral Sharp assured the Chairman that a rise in POL sorties would be apparent very shortly. He had been concentrating on cutting off the flow of additional POL into NVN, feeling that he could dry up the supply faster this way than by using all his effort against storage. His planes had increased their attacks on northeast rail and road LOCs, destroying also much coastal waterborne traffic believed to be moving POL.³

CINCPAC's POL strangulation plan, forwarded to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in late July, envisioned four interrelated actions: 1) reduce/limit POL importation; 2) destroy fixed POL targets; 3) destroy transitory POL targets; 4) conduct a POL reconnaissance program. Reduction of import POL required attacks on offshore loading facilities at ports, particularly around Haiphong and at Hon Gai and Cam Pha, attacks on coastal and channel shipping, and interdiction of the northeast rail line Hanoi-Dong Dang, and the northwest line Hanoi-Lao Cai. Fixed POL targets would be attacked to reduce their residual capacity. Transitory targets--boats, trains, trucks--and temporary storage areas would also be attacked.⁴

On 24 August General Wheeler presented Secretary McNamara with a progress report showing a great increase in attacks against fixed POL targets. The report noted that

2. (S) Msg, JCS 4277 to CINCPAC, 21 Jul 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 66.

3. (S) CM-1638-66 to SecDef, 23 Jul 66, same file.

4. (S) CM-1697-66 to SecDef, 24 Aug 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

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RT 51 had averaged over 2,400 sorties per week. Of these, 54 percent had been used in RP 1 near the DMZ to isolate the battlefield. POL targets in this area were attacked as a matter of course. The remaining sorties had been distributed among other areas of NVN, with POL targets receiving the highest priority. The northeast area, which had the greatest residual storage capacity, had been hit by an average of 246 sorties per week despite bad weather in that area.⁵

"In summary," the report stated, "CINCPAC is applying his full weight of effort against the NVN, with emphasis on isolating the battlefield in the south and attacking the over-all NVN POL system, including distribution." It pointed out that about 66,000 metric tons of residual POL storage capacity remained in all categories of POL targets, and that 17,000 metric tons of this storage capacity had not been authorized for attack. "We are chipping away at the POL storage capacity," the report concluded, "but based on estimated consumption, at present we are probably destroying only the surplus storage capacity."⁶

RT 52 Proposals

On 8 August Admiral Sharp recommended an expanded program to follow RT 51, asking for strikes against Phuc Yen POL, Kep POL, Cam Pha port POL, Thanh Hoa lock, Xom Trung Hoa lock, dredges in the Haiphong area, Hon Gai port railroad shops and Haiphong port warehouses. More than one-third of the residual POL in JCS targeted storage areas was at Phuc Yen and Kep. On 18 August the Chairman directed that a new package, RT 52, be developed and that the appropriate targets from the CINCPAC proposal be included.⁷

The resultant Joint Staff proposal called for a far-reaching program of strikes against major targets, combined with a reduction of NVN sanctuaries (to a 10 nm racetrack pattern around Hanoi-Phuc Yen, a circle of only 4 nm radius around Haiphong, and within 30/25 nm of the Chinese border),

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. (TS) Memo, J-3 to CJCS, 12 Aug 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 13, ROLLING THUNDER 52, Tab B. (S) Memo for Record, sgd Coleman, 18 Aug 66, same file, Tab D.

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and other features that would make it the most effective ROLLING THUNDER package to date. These features included 19 fixed targets, all of them high value and most of them clustered around Hanoi and Haiphong. Areas of the Haiphong port, TPPs at Haiphong, and portions of the Thai Nguyen steel plant, as well as ports, locks, storage areas, and important depots were proposed for attack.⁸

The Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the Joint Staff proposal for RT 52 on 19 August. On 22 August the package was presented to the Secretary of Defense, who directed that it be held in abeyance for the time being. The plan remained under study and discussion for nearly three months.⁹

Disparaging Evaluations of ROLLING THUNDER

Early in the Summer of 1966 Secretary McNamara, apparently still skeptical of the effectiveness of ROLLING THUNDER, had asked IDA to assess the effects of bomb damage on NVN. This assessment, prepared by the JASON Summer Study Group, was furnished the Secretary on 30 August. The consensus of the Group was that ROLLING THUNDER was ineffective and that it would not be effective even if air operations against NVN were expanded. The members of the Summer Study Group stated to the Secretary that

Under these circumstances, we as a group have grave doubts about the usefulness of continuing and expanding Rolling Thunder as one of the military instruments for speedier termination of the war in the South. It does not appear to be a productive way to spend our human and material resources, at least now that the political and military situations in the South are more stable and NVN has learned how to make Rolling Thunder costlier to us and less effective.

The possibility that the stability of the "political and military situations in the South" may have been attributable

8. (78-GP 3) Memo, no sig [J-3], for CJCS, 18 Aug 66, w/encs, same file; Tab 2. (78) Note to Control Div, "ROLLING THUNDER 52," 19 Aug 66, same file, Tab 3.

9. Ibid.

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to ROLLING THUNDER was not addressed by IDA.¹⁰

In the following month this pessimistic assessment was strengthened by a CIA/DIA appraisal which stated that, although ROLLING THUNDER pilots by 12 September had flown more than 73,000 armed reconnaissance and fixed target sorties, little had been achieved in reducing the enemy's will and capability to support the insurgencies in the RVN and Laos. CIA/DIA officials reported that 78 percent of the JCS targeted POL storage capacity had been destroyed and that Haiphong POL capacity had been reduced by 90 percent. Nevertheless, replenishment by Soviet tankers had prevented NVN from running out of POL. "No evidence of any shortages of POL in North Vietnam had been noted," the report stated, "and it must be assumed that stocks on hand and recent imports have been adequate to sustain necessary operations."¹¹

Although strikes against the NVN LOCs had been stepped up, the US intelligence analysts saw no evidence that the enemy encountered any serious problems in moving supplies "to or within NVN." With CHICOM engineering help and the diversion of a large labor force, NVN had maintained its transport capacity at the level required to meet its essential economic needs and to continue its logistic support of the military effort in RVN and Laos. Only two rail lines, the Hanoi-Lao Cai line and a line running south from Hanoi to Vinh, were known positively to be interdicted. The other three major rail lines (Hanoi-Dong Dang, Hanoi-Haiphong, and Hanoi-Thai Nguyen) were believed "operable for service." In spite of the increased intensity of RT 51, the CIA/DIA report asserted, "Hanoi retains the capability to continue support of activities in South Vietnam and Laos even at increased combat levels and force structure."¹²

According to the CIA/DIA report, ROLLING THUNDER strikes had caused about \$125 million in damage to the NVN economy. Because this damage was largely offset by aid provided Hanoi

10. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Memo, JASON Summer Study Group to SecDef, 30 Aug 66, IDA TS/HQ 66-60, OJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug-66.

11. (~~S~~-NOFORN-GP 1) CIA/DIA Rpt, "An Appraisal of the Bombing of North Vietnam (Through 12 September 1966)," Sep 66, OJCS Bulky File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.

12. Ibid.

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by other communist countries, however, the essential economic activities in NVN continued. There was said to be little evidence that the morale of the people of NVN had been weakened to any degree by US air strikes.¹³

Enemy Air Defenses--Concern Over Air Losses

In order to inflict on the enemy the damage which was now being reported in such negative terms, the United States had incurred heavy air losses. These losses had grown with the expansion of air operations in the northeast quadrant, and gave rise to growing concern among US officials. By far the greatest number of planes had been lost to AA/AAA fire, but the SAMs were also taking their toll. A significant increase in SAM firings had begun in July 1966 concurrent with the attacks on the POL system. A total of 122 Sam sites had been identified by late August 1966. The enemy had fired 662 missiles downing 28 US planes since the first SAM firing in July 1965. More dangerous than the missiles themselves, however, was the fact that, in operating over SAM threat areas, US pilots were forced into "compromise altitudes" in the lower spectrum of the SAM envelope. This increased their exposure to enemy antiaircraft. In evading missiles fired, pilots dropped under the effective envelope (3,000 feet), thus becoming even more vulnerable to enemy gunners. It was clear that the SAM threat was a substantial factor in the overall losses of US planes, apart from the losses suffered from SAM hits.¹⁴

General Wheeler wanted to be sure that the United States was doing everything possible within the current rules to keep losses down. Up to this point the increase in NVN AAA, SAM, and MIG capabilities had been matched by improved US tactics and material. The Chairman foresaw that with further training and materiel improvements NVN capability might outstrip that of the US forces, without an offsetting gain in US evasive/deception abilities. He stated to Admiral Sharp on 15 September that it would be "most useful . . . to have your thinking re characteristics and potential of a strike and EW programs directed against selected elements of enemy assets" that caused US aircraft losses over NVN. He asked also for a current review of related factors which would be "particularly

¹³. Ibid.

¹⁴. (S-GP 1) DJSM-1077-66 to CJCS, 25 Aug 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

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timely if our loss rate should increase significantly and generate pressure from various quarters for immediate and ill-conceived response."¹⁵

Admiral Sharp confirmed that the enemy had integrated his SAMs, MIGs, and AAA into a coordinated and dangerous defensive system. The SA-2 was forcing aircraft into lethal ground-fire range. The primary defense by US pilots was visual sighting of the missiles and immediate evasive action. Unfortunately, in looking for SAMs the pilots occasionally overlooked MIGs attacking from above and behind. Because of this, several planes had recently been lost to MIGs. Further, other planes had been forced to jettison bombs to avoid MIGs.

"The key to countering the threat of these three integrated systems, is, of course, defeat of the SA-2," Admiral Sharp said. If this could not be done for technical or other reasons, the United States might soon have to destroy the MIG bases. "We should start now to condition ourselves to this eventuality," he said. All three elements of the NVN system, the AAA, the SAMs, and the MIGs, were imported. Once it was determined how they were being brought in and where they were stored, attacks on the storage facilities should have top priority."¹⁶

The heaviest US losses were being suffered in the area north of Hanoi in trying to interdict LOCs in the northeast quadrant. "We need to broaden the pattern of our air operations," said CINCPAC. "We should decrease the emphasis on keeping the roads and railroads in the area north of Hanoi interdicted and strike targets that are more vulnerable and at the same time very valuable to the war-making capability of the enemy." These targets included the Thai Nguyen steel plant and the TPPs and material stockpiled on wharves, in warehouses, at railheads, and in the port areas. "These are lucrative targets," CINCPAC said, "whose value is commensurate with the risk involved."¹⁷

He pointed out that the enemy, when he applied his resources fully, was able to repair roads and railways rapidly. The POL campaign had been "attritive" but few worthwhile targets remained. The United States should reorient its air strikes to destroy the enemy's materiel or

15. (TS) Msg, JCS 2723 to CINCPAC, 15 Sep 66.

16. (TS-GP 1) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 192210Z Sep 66, JCS IN 21905.

17. Ibid.

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his means of producing that materiel. With specific reference to the enemy's SAM capability, CINCPAC assured the Chairman that his forces were constantly looking for ways to thwart the enemy and would continue to do so within their current weaponry and know-how. He did not expect any major improvement in the current situation. A change in the target pattern was the only way to get immediate improvement.¹⁸

General Wheeler informed CINCPAC that the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with his recommendations and that he was continuing to press for authorization to strike such targets in the new Rolling Thunder package, RT 52, then under discussion.¹⁹

Meanwhile the Secretary of Defense had studied air losses and had developed suggestions for at least changing the pattern of losses. In December 1965, OSD statisticians had prepared estimates of future aircraft losses based on limited experience with ROLLING THUNDER. On 17 September 1966, the Secretary furnished the Joint Chiefs of Staff statistics on monthly attack sorties showing the losses which his statisticians now predicted for each Service in NVN and Laos, based on more recent experience. These new statistics showed that the USN air losses would almost double those forecast in December 1965, but that the USAF would lose fewer aircraft than had been estimated.²⁰

Aircraft production schedules for FY 66/67 had been based on loss rates shown in the December 1965 estimates. If USN losses exceeded those estimates it would, the Secretary noted, imply a "substantial strain in Navy aircraft resources, especially fighters." Secretary McNamara therefore suggested that the Chairman investigate ways of cutting back on these USN losses. He suggested possibly shifting the USN sorties from NVN, which was a dangerous operating area, to Laos, which was less dangerous, or to the RVN, which was safer yet.²¹

18. Ibid.

19. (S) Msg, JCS 5855-66 to CINCPAC, 29 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.

20. (S-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, "SEA Utilization of Tactical Aircraft," 17 Sep 66, Att to JCS 2339/235, 22 Sep 66, JMF 9155 (17 Sep 66).

21. Ibid.

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"Compensating increases by the Air Force, if required," the Secretary stated, "would increase Air Force losses only slightly above the December Plan, and these losses could be more easily absorbed in the larger Air Force force structure." He asked the Chairman to review air operations to determine the number of probable attack and nonattack sorties in NVN and Laos and possible actions to reduce Navy air losses.²²

The Joint Chiefs of Staff were unable to verify the statistics used by the Secretary of Defense but did not consider them completely reliable. They used, for purposes of their review, data based on experience from July 1965 through August 1966. This data showed that shifting USN and USAF attack sortie responsibilities would decrease USN losses but would at the same time increase USAF losses. Overall losses would increase slightly since the USAF had a higher loss rate than the USN.²³

The Joint Chiefs of Staff furnished the Secretary with the review that he had requested on 6 October. They explained that accelerated air operations and increased enemy defense capabilities had caused variations from the loss rates developed by the OSD in December 1965. They maintained that to exchange sorties between the USAF and the USN as he had proposed would be "inadvisable at this time." Such exchange would result in significant operational difficulties. Current restrictions on operations and targeting in northern NVN, they informed the Secretary, forced the use of operational patterns that contributed directly to increased aircraft losses. "The limited geographical area and the paucity of targets authorized for strike tend to result in operations by the strike forces which can be predicted by the enemy, and to permit the enemy to concentrate his defenses."²⁴

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary that "a preferable method" of reducing both USN and USAF losses would be to broaden the pattern of air operations in NVN as recommended in RT 52. They pointed out that continued

22. Ibid.

23. (TS) Encl C to JCS 2339/235-1, 4 Oct 66, JMF 9155 (17 Sep 66).

24. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-645-66 to SecDef, 6 Oct 66, Encl A to JCS 2339/235-1, same file.

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interdiction had yielded relatively little return for the weight of effort, particularly north of Hanoi. Interdiction of the northeast rail lines and other LOCs had cost heavy aircraft losses without commensurate return in damage to the enemy. "By striking targets that are more vulnerable and of greater value to the war-making capability of the enemy and by reducing geographic restrictions, better results can be obtained with significantly fewer sorties and less attrition," the Joint Chiefs of Staff said. Rather than to shift sorties in order to distribute aircraft losses from one Service to the other, US air operations and targeting patterns should be broadened, they informed the Secretary of Defense. "The Joint Chiefs of Staff and PACOM commanders at all levels are concerned with aircraft losses and are taking appropriate action to minimize loss of US lives and aircraft," they concluded.²⁵ No formal reply was made by the Secretary of Defense.

On 29 September the Chairman informed CINCPAC that a recent study had shown that the set pattern of US air operations was a major factor in air losses. Prominent in this set pattern were the target systems and the sortie rate. With regard to the latter, the Chairman pointed out that the sortie requirement for CINCPAC's area had been validated and logistic planning to support that rate had been "laid on." He wanted CINCPAC to know, however, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not expect him to fly all authorized sorties just for the sake of meeting the quota. The Joint Chiefs of Staff would attempt to serve as a buffer between him and any pressures from other quarters to meet the quota just for its own sake. CINCPAC had already asked his component commanders to reduce, insofar as feasible, the risk to air crews. The Chairman asked him also to inform his commanders that there was no "sortie race" in Southeast Asia and to ask that they use ingenuity in overcoming the set pattern that air operations had taken on. This would, hopefully, help reduce air losses.²⁶

Admiral Sharp denied that his pilots or commanders were in a "sortie race." "What this air campaign needs more than anything else," he advised the Chairman on 20 October, "is permission to strike some good targets, of which there are plenty; as you well know." If his pilots had such targets,

25. Ibid.

26. (IS) Msg, JCS 5855-66 to CINCPAC, 29 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.

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they would produce maximum destruction with minimum sorties. "They are performing superbly with one hand tied behind their back The only continuing complaint that I have heard," he concluded, ". . . concerns the restrictions imposed and their firm belief that air power is not being used at its full effectiveness. In these thoughts I concur."²⁷

Status of JCS Targets--30 September 1966

Of eleven significant airfields in NVN which had been selected as targets by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, only four had been struck by 30 September. The remaining fields included jet-capable fields at Hanoi/Gia Lam, Phuc Yen, Haiphong/Cat Bi, and Kep. Sixty-one bridges had been targeted as being most important to the NVN transportation system. More than half of these had been totally destroyed, but the enemy had replaced most of them with bypasses or pontoon bridges. Eighteen ammunition storage depots had been targeted. Fourteen of these depots had been bombed, destroying almost 75 percent of the NVN storage capacity. Only four of the six major ports capable of handling maritime shipping had been attacked and these with negligible results. The ports at Hanoi (Red River) and Haiphong had not been attacked. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had targeted 20 thermal power plants in NVN, of which 11, including plants at Hanoi and Haiphong, had never been bombed. Of those struck, however, 7 had been rendered completely unproductive.²⁸

Civilian Casualties

ROLLING THUNDER planners and responsible commanders were under constant injunction to avoid collateral damage to civilian-type installations and to avoid killing civilians. The enemy realized this and took full advantage. CINCPAC reported in late October that NVN was using towns and villages as storage areas, to conceal SAM installations, and as way-stops for vehicle traffic. CINCPAC had to reply frequently

27. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 202111Z Oct 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 66.

28. (TS) J-3 DIA Rpt, "NVN Target Analysis," 30 Sep 66, OCJCS Bulky File 091 Vietnam Sep 66.

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to queries from higher authority as to the reasons for collateral damage. On the occasion of such a query about damage during attacks against the Thanh Hoa and Ninh Binh areas, he pointed out that at Ninh Binh the enemy had run a rail spur from adjacent yards down a town street for concealment. The spur, loaded with boxcars, had been successfully struck. "It is apparent in this instance," said Admiral Sharp, "that the exact letter of the restriction against striking targets in populated areas was not followed. However, in my opinion, the pilots made the correct decision. We are at war and some civilians are bound to get hurt. This was a valuable military target and should have been hit. . . . Every effort will be made in all attacks to minimize civilian casualties but we cannot let every populated area be a sanctuary for the enemy."29

The Joint Chiefs of Staff Object to Secretary McNamara's Memorandum

In mid-October General Wheeler received from Secretary McNamara a wide-ranging memorandum which the Secretary intended to give to the President. He asked for the JCS views, but stated that he did not wish to change his expressions of opinion. General Wheeler called the Joint Chiefs of Staff together on that same day for a consideration of the memorandum, and the results of their deliberation revealed a deep cleavage between their views and those of Secretary McNamara on the air campaign.30

In addressing the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the Secretary's paper, General Wheeler noted that the Secretary was appending extracts from current intelligence analyses, showing the essential fruitlessness of ROLLING THUNDER. Much of this analysis was based on statistics emphasizing the replacement cost of military supplies, facilities, and LOCs that had been destroyed in NVN. General Wheeler had already told the Secretary that he did not agree that the effect of

29. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 290110Z Oct 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 66.

30. (TS) CM-1831-66 to CNO et al., 14 Oct 66, same file.

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this destruction could be assessed in terms of how many dollars it would take to replace these items.³¹

At their meeting on 14 October the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared a detailed memorandum for the Secretary in which they pointed out their specific disagreement with some of the advice he apparently intended to give to the President. With particular regard to ROLLING THUNDER, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told Mr. McNamara that the restricted air campaign against NVN had destroyed substantial quantities of military supplies and war supporting facilities. The bombing had inflicted major damage on LOCs and had forced the diversion of at least 300,000 men from NVN agriculture and industry to repair and maintenance jobs. As evidence of the real effect of the bombing on NVN, the Joint Chiefs of Staff cited the demands and outcries of the communists and leftist sympathizers that the bombing be halted. The Secretary apparently intended to advise the President that there should be no increase in the level of bombing effort and no modification in areas and targets subject to air attack. The JCS objected that the air war was an integral and indispensable part of the overall war effort. "To be effective," they said, "the air campaign should be conducted with only those minimum constraints necessary to avoid indiscriminate killing of the population."³²

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recalled that in November 1964 they had recommended a "sharp knock" on NVN military assets and war supporting facilities rather than the campaign of slowly increasing pressure which was adopted. Whatever the political merits of the latter course, the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated, the United States had deprived itself of the military effects of an early weight of effort and shock and had given the enemy time to adjust to the slow quantitative and qualitative increases in pressure. It was still not too late to gain some military benefit from a more effective and extensive use of US air and naval superiority. The Joint Chiefs of Staff then recommended to the Secretary approval of RT 52 and "use of naval surface forces to interdict North Vietnamese coastal waterborne traffic and appropriate LOCs."

31. Ibid.

32. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-672-66 to SecDef, 14 Oct, 66, JMF 9155.3 (14 Oct 66).

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They also requested authority "to attack other coastal military targets such as radar and AAA sites." In conclusion they asked the Secretary to present their views to the President.³³

General Wheeler attended a meeting of the National Security Council on 15 October. Just prior to this meeting he talked with the President in company with the Vice President, Secretary McNamara, and Deputy Secretary Vance. President Johnson seemed receptive to striking a "few targets of greater worth" in NVN, despite advice he had received from "some quarters" to forego expanding the target system or increasing the weight of effort. He was, however, opposed to reducing the sanctuaries around Hanoi and Haiphong. The Chairman told Admiral Sharp, who was to be in Manila, that he probably would be discussing the air campaign with the President there and suggested that if so, he do it "in a broad way." "Since we are committed to a program of increasing pressures," General Wheeler observed, "we should continue to increase pressures rather than staying on a level or decreasing effort."³⁴

The SAM Threat

By the end of October 1966, 890 SAMs had been fired at US aircraft and a total of 32 aircraft had been lost to missiles. By this time losses to ground fire totaled 298 attack and reconnaissance planes and 78 support planes (SAR, ECM, etc.). The significant increase in firings since July 1966 indicated the availability of a considerable stockpile of missiles and necessary support equipment.³⁵

Because of the continuing concern over the SAM threat a high level conference to devise better methods of coping with it was convened at CINCPAC's headquarters in late October. Experts representing the Services, CIA, DOD, CINCSAC, and COMUSMACV and the Joint Chiefs of Staff attended this conference.³⁶

33. Ibid.

34. (S) Msg, JCS 6339-66 to CINCPAC, 17 Oct 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 66.

35. (S-GP 3) Study, "Attack of North Vietnam-ROLLING THUNDER 52 (U)," n.d. /30 Oct 66/, w/handwritten comment, same file.

36. (S-GP 3) Conference Rpt, Encl to Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS et al., Ser 5050, 22 Nov 66, JMF 9155.3 (22 Nov 66).

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The experts at the conference did not consider the SAM problem in isolation but examined the overall threat, including automatic weapons, AAA, enemy aircraft, and all related aspects. Their conclusion was that NVN had a highly effective air defense system, a major part of which was made up of 28 to 32 SA-2 battalions. Most of these units were concentrated in northern NVN. An expansion of this system to a maximum of 40 battalions was possible, the limiting factor being trained personnel rather than equipment. The Soviet Union was supporting the system with "virtually unimpeded supply of weapons and equipment," and had announced its intention to furnish even more sophisticated weapons, possibly the SA-3.

Although the United States had not been very successful in destroying SAM sites, US countermeasures and techniques had largely thwarted the potential of the enemy's missile system for shooting down large numbers of aircraft. CINCPAC's current policy for attacking SAM sites was to divert strike forces from other missions and to attack occupied sites immediately upon their discovery. This was necessary because sites became "fleeting" targets if not attacked at once. Because of this mobility and enemy skill at camouflage, precise acquisition of targets by photo reconnaissance was very difficult and would become more so as the enemy improved his techniques.³⁷

The conference report pointed out that the SAM sites were rapidly becoming equal in importance to any prime targets in NVN. The conclusion of the conference experts was, however, that an aggressive campaign against the entire SAM system was not "feasible at this time," owing to shortage of planes and proper munitions, the difficulty in locating sites, and the mobility of the system. They recommended instead that, if they could be precisely located, the control centers through which the system was coordinated be attacked and that missile storage and equipment areas, be designated high priority targets for ROLLING THUNDER.³⁸

The AAA and the SAMs were closely related in the NVN air defense system both in nature and function. The number of

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

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AAA units and their concealment made any air campaign to destroy them impractical. For the same reason the air defense experts rejected as "counter productive" the concept of destroying the entire NVN radar network used to support both SAMs and AAA. As to the other element of the system, the MIGs, the conference report stated that, even if a major effort were made against NVN aircraft, such an effort would be "unrewarding in terms of reduction of the SA-2 threat." US strike pilots would still be denied freedom of action at altitudes above the flak envelope because of the SAM threat.

The report pointed out that the most heavily defended areas were RP 6A and RP 6B. "Consideration should be given," the report stated, "to maintaining only significant presence in these areas until we have targets approved that warrant the risk presently involved."³⁹ Current measures being employed by US air forces to thwart the SAM threat involved the use of highly sophisticated and effective ECM equipment. Not all planes in the ROLLING THUNDER inventory were equipped fully, however, since some of this equipment was scarce. The study group noted the Soviet intention to improve the missile defense posture in NVN, and said that the Soviets might be deterred in this if the United States matched any such improvement by an upgrading of its own ECM and anti-SAM weapon capability in the theater. Other measures that could possibly deter the Soviets from upgrading the NVN SAM capability would include appeals to world opinion branding such a move an escalation of the war, and making it "hard policy" not to recognize any sanctuary in NVN insofar as the attacks on improved SAM systems were concerned.⁴⁰

The conference report then listed recommendations for meeting the SAM threat in the short term. These dealt mainly with policies to be followed in the field of ECM, including the installation and procurement of equipment, and in the techniques, weapons, and strategies for operations against the system. Among these recommendations was one that approval be granted for destruction of key NVN port facilities through which SAMs and their supporting equipment were being imported.⁴¹

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

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Admiral Sharp selected some of the recommendations of the conference report and forwarded them to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 19 November, urging that they be given special attention and emphasis. Three days later he forwarded the entire report with the full recommendations. On 29 November the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC that they concurred in his selected recommendations and were taking those actions that were possible to support them.⁴²

RT 52 Approval

Meanwhile, on 8 November, following the President's return from Manila, the Chairman had renewed his efforts to gain approval of RT 52. In a memorandum to the Secretary, urging that he take the matter up with the President, the Chairman stated:

. . . the Joint Chiefs of Staff are convinced that we should increase military pressures on North Vietnam. They believe that the military actions designed to reduce still further the capabilities of the North Vietnamese to receive help from out-of-country, to move men and materiel in-country and from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, and to reduce in-country war-supporting facilities and supplies are necessary and feasible -- militarily, politically, and psychologically.

The RT 52 package was then explained in detail to the Secretary, with justification for all high value targets and for reducing the sanctuary areas around Hanoi and Haiphong.⁴³

The fixed targets proposed at this time included three SAM support facilities, POL facilities at Ha Gai and Can Thon (formerly erroneously identified as being at Phuc Yen and Kep respectively), the Thai Nguyen steel plant, the

42. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 192247Z Nov 66, JCS IN 43412; (TS-GP 3) Conference Rpt, Encl to Ltr, CINCPAC to JCS et al., Ser 5050, 22 Nov 66; JMF 9155.3 (22 Nov 66). (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9088 to CINCPAC, 29 Nov 66.

43. (TS) CM-1906-66 to SecDef, 8 Nov 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 66.

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Haiphong cement plant, two TPPs at Haiphong, four waterway locks, and selected areas of Cam Pha and Haiphong.⁴⁴ The Joint Chiefs of Staff also recommended that naval surface craft be allowed to interdict coastal shipping in the area between 17°30' N. and 20° N. latitude.

The President approved RT 52 on 11 November, and CINCPAC was authorized to strike all of the fixed targets recommended, but with limiting instructions. He was told to strike the Thai Nguyen steel plant, Haiphong cement plant, and the two TPPs at Haiphong prior to 18 November, weather and operational factors permitting. Those not struck by that time would not be struck until the Joint Chiefs of Staff had again cleared them. With regard to the Van Dien vehicle depot, near Hanoi, there was considerable concern that excessive civilian casualties might result. Therefore CINCPAC was told to take extreme care and extraordinary precautions to insure accuracy by his pilots. He was authorized a total of 13,200 attack sorties per month against NVN and Laos, interchanging sorties as necessary. Restrikes of Hanoi and Haiphong POL would require specific authorization. The area for "certain surface naval operations" was raised to 18° N. rather than to 20° N. as proposed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁴⁵

The proviso on striking the four targets prior to 18 November had been added for political reasons. The UK Foreign Minister, Mr. George Brown, was to visit Moscow about 20 November, and it had been judged undesirable to strike these "politically sensitive targets" in the few days just preceding his visit. The Chairman assured CINCPAC, however, that this did not mean that "hell or high water" he had to strike the targets before 18 November. After Mr. Brown left Moscow, there would be no difficulty in getting the targets reinstated.⁴⁶

Within a few hours after sending these instructions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed CINCPAC to defer strikes on

⁴⁴. Ibid.

⁴⁵. (TO GP 3) JCS 7735 to CINCPAC, 11 Nov 66.

⁴⁶. (TS) Msg, CJCS 6925-66 to CINCPAC, 11 Nov 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 66.

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the Thai Nguyen and the Haiphong targets. General Wheeler informed CINCPAC that this change also stemmed from the visit of the UK Foreign Minister to Moscow and the political sensitivity of the UK/Soviet Co-Chairmanship of the Geneva Conference. He had been assured that when Mr. Brown left Moscow, about 25 November, clearance to strike these targets would be forthcoming. In another vein, the Chairman asked that CINCPAC's public affairs staff refrain from publicly depicting RT 52 as an escalation of ROLLING THUNDER. "As you know," he concluded,

both domestically and internationally, any time we undertake a slightly different or increased initiative, it is characterized by those opposing U.S. policy as "escalatory." As you know "escalatory" has become a dirty word; and such charges, true or false, impose further inhibitions here against moving ahead to win this war.⁴⁷

On 21 November the Chairman informed CINCPAC that he had been "approached by the White House" with the suggestion that as soon as weather permitted CINCPAC should strike all targets authorized under RT 52 in the shortest possible time, "presumably one day." This measure had been offered as another means of minimizing the effects of ROLLING THUNDER during Mr. Brown's visit to Moscow. He had demurred at this suggestion, said General Wheeler, and pointed out that such a concentration of aircraft at one time would present too valuable a target to the MIGs and SAMs.⁴⁸

By 9 December, although Mr. Brown had come and gone from Moscow, the four "politically" sensitive targets were still being kept inviolate. On that date General Wheeler raised the question with the President, but the President refused, because of "certain political problems," to approve strikes on these targets. He told the Chairman that he would take the matter up with him in the following week.⁴⁹

47. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 7783 to CINCPAC, 11 Nov 66; (~~TS~~) Msg, JCS 6926-66 to CINCPAC, 11 Nov 66; same file.

48. (~~TS~~) Msg, JCS 7105-66 to CINCPAC, 21 Nov 66, same file.

49. For further discussion of the political problems referred to, see Ch. 40.

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The whole matter became academic, however, when on 13-14 December RT 52 attacks on the Yen Vien railroad classification yard and the Van Dien vehicle depot, both very close to Hanoi, created an international uproar. These attacks sparked charges that the United States had deliberately bombed a thickly populated part of Hanoi and had killed many civilians. Both targets had been struck earlier, on 2 and 4 December respectively, but attacks on these targets in the second week of December unaccountably brought a storm of protest.

Eye-witness reports of the bombing by reasonably unbiased observers revealed that damage had undoubtedly been caused, but whether it resulted from bombs or from NVN antiaircraft and missiles was not clear. These observers seemed to agree that the United States had destroyed valid targets and had not deliberately aimed at the civilian elements near the target area. On the other hand, Soviet and Chinese news reports charged that deliberate bombing had killed many civilians, damaged embassy buildings, and destroyed homes of people in the area.

Because weather and operational factors precluded accurate BDA, full information on what had actually happened near the two targets was difficult to assemble. Reports from observers on the scene indicated that damage inside Hanoi itself was concentrated around the western edge of the Red River bridge. Just how damage to the civilian structures in the area had been caused could not be established, but there was certainly a question as to whether enemy AAA and SAMs in falling to the earth had not done most of the damage charged against US pilots.

During the attacks on Yen Vien and Van Dien at least 125 SAMs were fired against US planes and it was likely that at least some of them had fallen into the city or suburban areas. In addition, AAA fire was intense and could also have created considerable debris.⁵⁰

On 21 December CINCPAC learned that the strikes against Yen Vien railroad yard had inadvertently struck another

50. (98) Tabs 21, and 24, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 13, ROLLING THUNDER 52. (S-NOFORN) DIA IB 244-66, 19 Dec 66, p. A-9.

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target two and a half miles southwest on the same rail line. The general layout of the targets was very similar and the scattered cloud cover coupled with the intense air defense activity in the area had contributed to this error.⁵¹

The intensity of the protests, apart from the question of their validity, caused the President to direct that neither of the targets be struck again. On 15 December the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered CINCPAC to suspend strikes against Yen Vien and Van Dien until further notice.⁵²

On 16 December CINCPAC asked to be allowed to attack a number of cargo transshipment barges operating from ship to shore and from ship to barge southeast of Tien Yen, about six miles within the Chinese buffer zone. Because the US policy was to avoid confrontation with Communist China and because the "Washington climate" was not right at the moment, the Joint Chiefs of Staff denied his request.⁵³

On 23 December, because of certain sensitive negotiations in which Italian and Polish authorities were acting as intermediaries between the United States and NVN, the President directed that no attacks be conducted against targets within 10 nm of the center of Hanoi. This did not limit reconnaissance operations. Transit of the Hanoi area by strike aircraft was to be avoided. The Joint Chiefs of Staff warned CINCPAC to communicate this new restriction only to those who must know and to keep newsmen from learning of it. The President had imposed the restriction because of a possibility that if the United States halted its bombing within 10 nm of the center of Hanoi for an indefinite period NVN might agree to begin talking about negotiations. CINCPAC was not told the real reason for the prohibition and naturally assumed that it stemmed from the loud outcries made by the enemy in newspapers and elsewhere.⁵⁴

51. (TS-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 232042Z Dec 66. JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 13, ROLLING THUNDER 52, Tab 26.

52. (TS) Msg, JCS 1471 to CINCPAC, 15 Dec 66.

53. (TS) Tabs 22, and 23, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 13, ROLLING THUNDER 52.

54. (TS) Msg, State 106358 to Warsaw, 21 Dec 65 (text from White House). (TS) Msg, JCS 2135 to CINCPAC, 23 Dec 66. See Ch. 40 for details of these negotiations.

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Admiral Sharp made a strong but futile objection. He protested that the United States had just started to put some real pressure on the enemy, and that the strikes against the rail yard and vehicle depot had hit him hard. "Then," he said, "Hanoi complains that we have killed a few civilians, hoping that they would get a favorable reaction. And they did, more than they could have hoped for."⁵⁵

By its success in establishing a 10 nm strike-free area around Hanoi, said CINCPAC, NVN would be encouraged to continue its aggression, hoping to outlast the United States. Because there were by this time nearly 400,000 US fighting men in the RVN, Hanoi must realize that it could not force a military victory. But it could carry on a protracted guerrilla war, terrorizing and killing the people. "This kind of war can go on for a long time," Sharp asserted, "if we let them get away with it." In his opinion, the United States had better conclude the war as soon as possible because the American people were getting impatient. If some civilians got killed in the course of the air strikes, that was regrettable but necessary. Admiral Sharp emphasized that "we need to get hard-headed about it. That is the only kind of action that these tough Communists will respect. That is the way to get the war over soonest."

He called again for authority to hit all the targets originally included in RT 52. "And then when Hanoi screams in anguish, we should hit them again."⁵⁶

Further ROLLING THUNDER Planning

In accordance with the instructions for the Christmas and the New Year truce periods, all air attacks against NVN were suspended during the periods from 0700 on 24 December to 0700 on 26 December and from 0700 31 December to 0200 2 January 1967.

Planning for ROLLING THUNDER nevertheless went on. In spite of Admiral Sharp's protestations, with which he was largely in sympathy, General Wheeler, in issuing guidance

55. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 242142Z Dec 66, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 13, ROLLING THUNDER 52, Tab 39.

56. Ibid.

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to the Joint Staff for the next ROLLING THUNDER, RT 53, directed a "middle-of-the-road" approach. In this he was merely being realistic. The propaganda from Hanoi that erupted in mid-December, followed by strong political reaction in the United States and the impact of the negotiation initiatives, made it highly unlikely that the President would approve a strong ROLLING THUNDER program. The Chairman was also concerned that for political reasons the national policy might be changed to halt the air campaign in the northern and most valuable target areas of NVN, Route Packages 5, 6A, and 6B.⁵⁷

The program developed by the Joint Staff as a result of this guidance was presented to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for consideration on 4 January 1967. Eighteen JCS numbered targets (3 barracks, 4 ammunition depots, 1 storage area, 2 supply depots, 6 TPPs, 1 cement plant, and elements of a steel complex) were recommended for strike. A total of 121 civilian casualties was predicted if these strikes were carried out.⁵⁸

The final RT 53 program, approved by the President and ordered carried out beginning on 24 January, was a watered-down version of an already mild proposal. It contained authorization to strike only nine targets, all of them, from the viewpoint of US military leaders, of low value and innocuous, comprising barracks, storage, and depot facilities for ammunition and other supplies. The Hanoi prohibited area was now formally recognized as a circle 10 nm from the center of the city, while the Hanoi and Haiphong restricted areas were within 30 nm of Hanoi and within 10 nm of the center of Haiphong. Within these restricted areas a few LOCs and some dispersed POL and SAM support areas could be bombed.⁵⁹

ROLLING THUNDER, 1966--A Recapitulation and Appraisal

The strong pressures to reduce the scope and effectiveness of ROLLING THUNDER came at a time when other issues with

57. (U) Memo for Record, sgd. Coleman, 26 Dec 66;
(TS-GP 3) CJCS informal working paper, "ROLLING THUNDER 53,"
26 Dec 66; JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 14, ROLLING THUNDER 53,
Tab 1.

58. (TS) Briefing for RT 53, 4 Jan 67, same file, Tab 1.

59. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4441 to CINCPAC, 24 Jan 67.

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regard to the program, its effectiveness, its cost and the general wisdom of conducting it; were also in doubt. Therefore, in connection with RT 53, General Wheeler asked the Joint Staff to furnish him certain appraisals of the results thus far achieved in the air campaign, the effectiveness of the enemy's air defenses, the costs of the campaign to the United States, and information on civilian casualties.

During 1966 US planes had flown 81,000 attack sorties and 48,000 combat support sorties against NVN. Armed reconnaissance against NVN since the beginning of ROLLING THUNDER was estimated to have destroyed or damaged 9,260 trucks, 13,400 waterborne logistic craft, and nearly 2,500 items of railroad stock, including 31 locomotives.

The Joint Staff estimates furnished General Wheeler on 3 January 1967 showed that measurable losses inflicted on NVN by ROLLING THUNDER through November 1966 had amounted to \$184 million, \$116 million in economic costs and \$68 million in military equipment and facilities. Increased defense costs, loss of production, lower productivity of labor, and man hours lost from civil defense actions were very real losses to the enemy, but they could not be measured accurately. About 20 percent of NVN military forces were directly tied up in defensive programs against ROLLING THUNDER, and about 300,000 civilians had been diverted to repair, reconstruction, and dispersal programs. Over 80 percent of the targeted POL in NVN had been destroyed. Destruction of facilities at Haiphong had more than doubled unloading time for tankers. US air strikes had forced the enemy to disperse his facilities and had thus made it more difficult for him to conduct military logistics and maintenance activities. The enemy had incurred great expense and made major efforts to mount his modern air defenses. He had lost one-third of his total gunboat fleet.

On the other hand, ROLLING THUNDER had not substantially reduced the capacity of NVN's fixed military establishment. In terms of national capacity no major military target system, barracks, airfields, SAM sites, naval bases, radar or supply depots, had suffered as much as 25 percent damage. NVN still retained the capability to continue to support the present level of activity in NVN and RVN. Much of this was owing to the fact that most of the major military facilities were in "sanctuary areas".

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Bombing restrictions had limited the impact on any critical sector of the economy, and the damage sustained had not yet reached unacceptably high levels. The cost of bomb damage had been broadly distributed throughout the economy and, more important, bombing losses were more than compensated for by foreign aid.⁶⁰

By the end of 1966 the enemy had in NVN between 115 and 120 MIG aircraft, 15 of which were MIG 21s. The JCS had not sought, since March 1966, authority to eliminate the threat of enemy MIGs by attacks on NVN airfields. In the meantime attacks, and the threat of attacks, by MIGs had continued increasingly to hamper ROLLING THUNDER. During the month of December alone 17 engagements had taken place between US aircraft and communist MIGs. A significant number of US planes had been forced to jettison their ordnance. During the period 1-24 December, MIG activity had compelled 44 US aircraft to jettison approximately 91 tons of ordnance.⁶¹

Recently MIG pilots had been demonstrating increased capability, and were now employing air-to-air missiles against US planes. The Chairman was also informed that "North Korean pilots are flying MIGs thereby improving NVN combat potential." Nevertheless, the combat edge was still with the United States. Between 3 April 1965 and 2 January 1967 the United States lost a total of 13 planes to enemy aircraft as opposed to 34 communist planes claimed by US pilots.

The majority of US air losses came from the 6,900 AW and AAA weapons that had been located in NVN; these weapons ranged from heavy machine guns to 100mm artillery. The enemy had deployed from 25 to 30 battalions of SAMs throughout the country, and had established a sophisticated and effective air-warning and ground control intercept capability to support his weapons.

The Joint Staff also provided the Chairman with evidence indicating that the effects of ROLLING THUNDER were

60. (TS) DJSM-10-67 to CJCS, 3 Jan 67, w/encl, JMF 9155 (18 Feb 65) sec 14, ROLLING THUNDER 53, Tab 1. (TS) CJCS Briefing for NSC, 7 Feb 67, same file, Tab 21.

61. Ibid.

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being felt by the enemy, particularly in the RVN. The rate of VC/NVA buildup in the RVN had dropped substantially, with only a 25,300 net increase in strength in the RVN during 1966 as opposed to a net increase of 110,600 during 1965. VC population and area control had dropped also. In March 1965 the VC had controlled 26 percent of the population and 60 percent of the area. In November 1966 US estimates credited the VC with controlling only 17.5 percent of the population and 48 percent of the area.

As for charges that ROLLING THUNDER was too costly in terms of dollars, the Joint Staff pointed out that the cost of inflicting one dollar's worth of damage on NVN during 1966 had been \$9.50. Comparing the GNPs of the two countries (\$630 billion-US and \$1.5 billion-NVN) the US equivalent cost was two cents for destruction of a dollar's worth of NVN capability.

With respect to the furor raised "by elements of the foreign and domestic press" over "alleged" civilian casualties in NVN, the Joint Staff informed the Chairman that these elements espoused the false premise that the United States was attacking the civilian population of NVN as one of its military objectives. This derogated the very real and costly efforts the United States had made to avoid harming civilians, agriculture, and the economy of NVN, and further inhibited the effectiveness of US air actions. Civilian casualties inflicted by the VC in the RVN from 1 January to 25 November 1966 had amounted to a total of 11,387 killed, wounded, or kidnapped. It was estimated that during the same period ROLLING THUNDER strikes had inflicted about 14,600 civilian casualties on NVN. This estimate was based on CIA factors.⁶²

Early in 1967 General Wheeler, addressing the NSC on the air campaign against NVN, pointed out that NVN had organized a propaganda campaign, domestic and foreign, designed to force the US to stop bombing operations against NVN without conditions. This fact, plus other statistics and judgments available, made it clear that ROLLING THUNDER was hurting NVN and making it pay a substantial price for its aggression in the RVN. Obviously Hanoi wanted a cessation of air attacks so that the people now engaged in the repair and upkeep of LOCs, air defense, and coastal defense could be freed for other employment. If air attacks were halted,

⁶². Ibid.

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NVN would be able to move men and supplies with impunity in a sanctuary. The net result would be that the US/FWMAF and RVNAF would be forced to face larger bodies of better supplied and supported enemy forces with accompanying greater casualties.

"I believe that the air campaign against North Vietnam is one of two blue chips available to President Johnson to be used in negotiations," General Wheeler told the NSC, "the other being the presence and aggressive use of U.S. ground troops in South Vietnam. It is my judgment that our air campaign is an integral and indispensable component of our over-all operations in Southeast Asia."⁶³

Operation SEA DRAGON

Adding to the pressures against NVN the United States began in 1966 a program of naval gunfire against certain types of targets as an adjunct of ROLLING THUNDER. On 5 May 1965 the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended that US naval warships bombard the Ile du Tigre as part of the ROLLING THUNDER program. The Secretary of Defense had, at that time, approved the recommendation in principle, saying that it would be considered for inclusion in ROLLING THUNDER at a later date. Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff included proposals for naval bombardment of the island in a number of subsequent ROLLING THUNDER draft planning messages, these were invariably disapproved by the Secretary of Defense.⁶⁴

On three occasions in early 1966, US Navy destroyers engaged NVN coastal shore batteries during SAR operations. None of the incidents provoked any adverse political reactions. On 1 May CINCPAC asked to augment ROLLING THUNDER with naval gunfire operations against NVN, particularly during bad weather. He named specific targets, mainly around Vinh, asking to be allowed to take them under fire with naval artillery. He cited among the advantages: 1) targets heavily defended by antiaircraft would be vulnerable to naval artillery;

63. (TS) Statement, CJCS, 7 Feb 67, Att. to Ltr, CJCS to SecState, 8 Feb 67, same file, Tab 21.

64. (TS-GP 3) Rpt, J-3 to JCS, JCS 2343/824, 9 May 66, JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).

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2) naval gunfire could deliver large amounts of ordnance accurately, with low collateral risk to nonmilitary targets; 3) naval gunfire was effective during bad weather and during darkness; 4) it was economical in relation to air attack costs. Although he expected enemy retaliation against attacking ships, CINCPAC was confident that, in view of the self-defense characteristics of the ships involved, the risk was militarily acceptable.⁶⁵

The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with CINCPAC, and on 13 May proposed to Secretary McNamara that US naval vessels be allowed to employ naval gunfire against suitable targets ashore and in the coastal waters of NVN between 17° N. and 20° N. latitude. Targets would include radar sites, SAM sites, AA sites, and LOCs. In their view such employment of naval gunfire would augment the air campaign and do much to thwart enemy air defenses. The vessels required to carry out this naval gunfire program were already in the area of the Tonkin Gulf, operating in support of aircraft carriers. The Joint Chiefs of Staff pointed out that the US naval gunfire capability was already being used extensively against the VC in RVN. There would be political problems, but they were not very significant in relation to the military and other advantages to be derived.⁶⁶

The Secretary of Defense did not reply to this recommendation for several months. During that time, because of US pressures against routes through Laos and because of monsoon rains, the enemy made increasing use of the coastal routes through southern NVN and through the DMZ. In late July and early August CINCPAC and COMUSMACV made additional requests to be allowed to subject vulnerable routes and other targets to naval gunfire. These included logistic targets in the Vinh complex, ferries, a highway segment, and watercraft used to deliver supplies to the DMZ.⁶⁷

The Chairman, concerned that no action had been taken on JCS recommendations for the use of naval gunfire, personally raised the question with Mr. McNamara. On 7 September

65. (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 012359Z May 66, JCS IN 54067.

66. (TS-GP 3) JCSM-325-66 to SecDef, 13 May 66 (derived from JCS 2343/824), JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).

67. (TS-GP 3) Encl B to JCS 2343/824-1, 18 Aug 66, same file.

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he recommended that the Secretary take favorable action on the JCS recommendations for attacks against coastal targets in NVN. He apparently received no direct reply immediately. On 13 September, however, General Wheeler informed CINCPAC that a request, associated with an ARC LIGHT strike recommendation, to employ naval gunfire along the coastal areas from 17° N. to 17°52' N. had been disapproved by higher authority. He told CINCPAC at that time, however, "I believe that favorable consideration for naval gunfire support along the southern coast of NVN in support of our combat operations can be obtained if CINCPAC and COMUSMACV can limit the area of operation or further specify the targets to be engaged."⁶⁸

On 14 October the Chairman informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that their recommendations of 13 May on naval gunfire had been approved in part. Naval gunfire operations to interdict NVN military and logistic waterborne traffic in the coastal waters of NVN south of 17°30' N. were authorized. Naval bombardment of targets ashore in NVN was not authorized except in self-defense. These operations, conducted under the nickname SEA DRAGON, began on 25 October, with two US destroyers assigned to gunfire missions. On 29 October CINCPAC gave specific authorization for SEA DRAGON forces to fire upon logistic craft when beached or moored.⁶⁹

In connection with RT 52, on 11 November, the limit of the authority for naval gunfire operations against waterborne military traffic was raised to 18° N. On 24 November CINCPAC asked for authority "as a matter of urgency" to use artillery and naval gunfire against clearly defined military activity in NVN north of the line of demarcation in the DMZ, to include the TALLY HO area south and east of the Dai Giang River. Enemy activities in that area indicated extensive AAA and fortifications within the DMZ and extending approximately seven kilometers farther north. The enemy could emplace additional artillery just north of the DMZ, enabling him to fire on friendly forces south of the DMZ. On 11 November four friendly aircraft had been shot down in that area. Because current rules allowed artillery and naval gunfire

68. (S) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 23 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/824-2, 26 Sep 66, same file.

69. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, p. 587.

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only in that portion of the DMZ south of the demarcation line, the enemy had built up his AAA and fortifications without fear of attack. He was obviously aware of the self-imposed restriction and was taking advantage of it, under cover of bad weather, to develop positions north of the line of demarcation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended, as "militarily prudent," the extension of authority to employ both artillery and naval gunfire in the portion of the DMZ north of the line of demarcation and the TALLY HO area which CINCPAC and COMUSMACV had prescribed.⁷⁰

The Joint Chiefs of Staff notified CINCPAC on 10 December that his request to use artillery and naval gunfire against clearly defined military activity in NVN territory had been "not favorably considered at this time." CINCPAC was informed, however, that he could employ artillery fire against weapons firing on friendly forces from positions north of the demarcation line.⁷¹

On 7 December the Joint Chiefs of Staff again asked the Secretary of Defense for an answer to their 13 May request. At the same time they informed him that they believed that the employment of naval gunfire against suitable targets ashore and in the NVN coastal waters between 17° and 20° N. latitude would augment and increase the overall effectiveness of the current interdiction campaign, with moderate and acceptable risk to ships. They felt that the limited operations that had already been carried out had contributed materially to reducing enemy military and logistic waterborne traffic in the southern coastal area of NVN.⁷²

During operations from 25 October to the end of December 1966, SEA DRAGON, employing only two destroyers on stations, virtually stopped the southward flow of enemy coastal maritime traffic between 17° N. and 18° N. latitude. These destroyers had sunk 382 waterborne logistic craft and damaged 325 others, destroyed five shore batteries and damaged two more, and had destroyed two radar sites and damaged two others. But the wider authority sought by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 13 May had not been granted by the end of the year.⁷³

70. (~~TS~~) Note to Control Div, 14 Oct 66; (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 5427 to CINCPAC, 14 Oct 66; (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-736-66 to Sec Def, 29 Nov 66 (derived from JCS 2343/964); JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).

71. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Msg, JCS 1122 to CINCPAC, 10 Dec 66.

72. (~~TS~~-GP 3) JCSM-755-66 to SecDef, 7 Dec 66 (derived from JCS 2343/941-1), JMF 9155.3 (1 May 66).

73. (~~TS~~ ~~NOFORN~~ GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, p. 591.

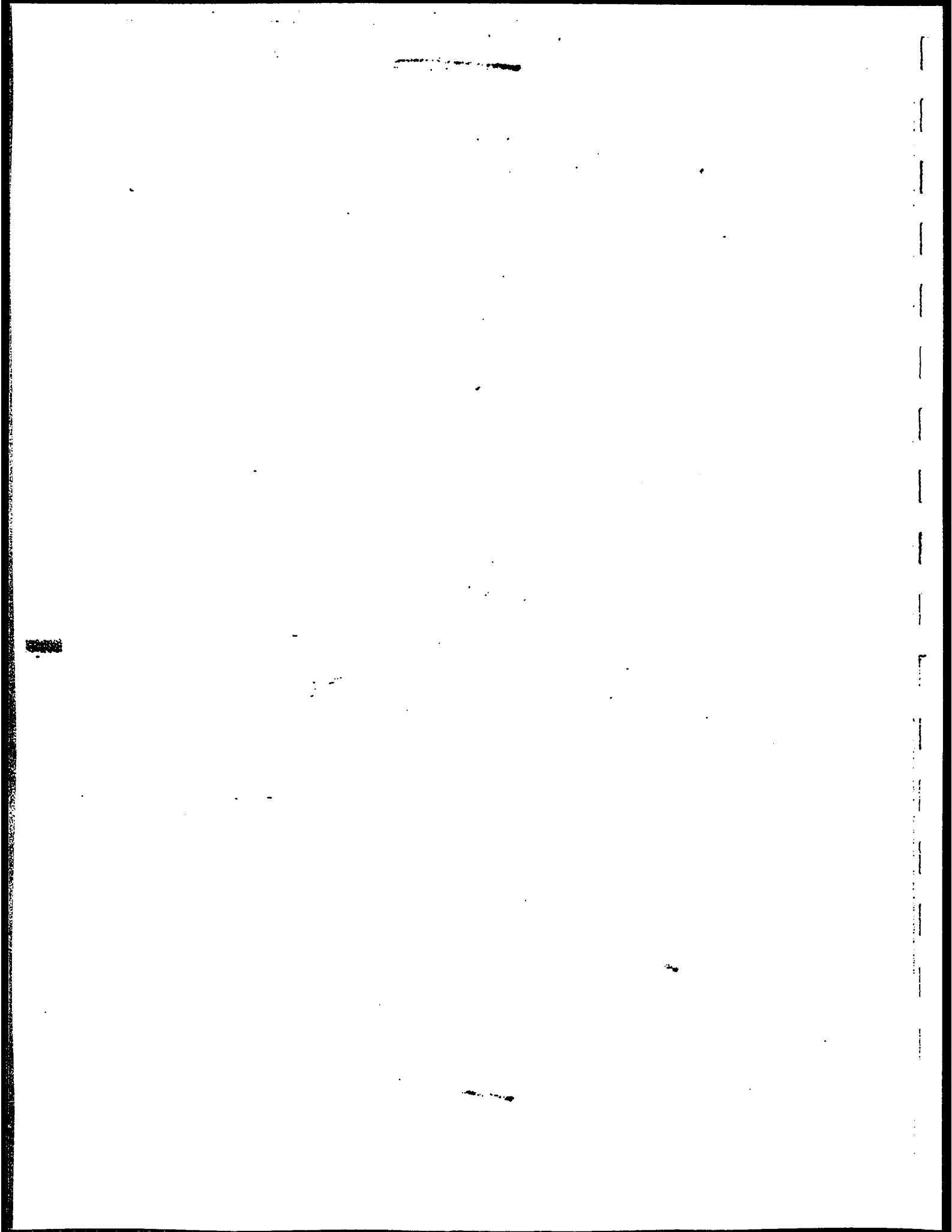
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In their proposals for RT 53 the Joint Chiefs of Staff again asked permission to carry out naval gunfire missions against the NVN coast as far north as 20° N. latitude. The final authority for RT 53 on 24 January 1967 granted a rise of the northern limit only to 19° N. latitude.⁷⁴

74. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 4441 to CINCPAC, 24 Jan 67.

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Chapter 37

EXPANDING THE BASE--LOGISTIC PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS, 1966

By the beginning of 1966 much progress had been made in establishing and expanding the logistics base needed to support both the additional forces sent to the RVN and the increased scope of US actions against NVN. The problems identified by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in early 1965 had either been solved or were well on the way to solution. In their stead, additional problems generated by the accelerated tempo of the war arose during 1966. Many of these, although primarily theater or service problems, were soluble only at the DOD level. Nevertheless, while their own involvement and influence varied from problem to problem, the Joint Chiefs of Staff maintained an intense interest in all logistic matters relating to the war in Vietnam. They took every action possible within their authority to forestall logistic problems or, when problems arose, to reduce the adverse effects on military operations.¹

The Construction Program

Despite hurried planning, a lack of trained personnel, sometimes insufficient funds, and a scarcity of needed materials, the United States had made remarkable progress during 1965 in developing a logistics base for US operations. In the area of airfield construction, the three existing jet-capable fields at Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa, and Da Nang were improved and expanded. US forces had constructed new jet-capable airfields at Chu Lai and Cam Ranh Bay, using aluminum matting, and another field was under construction at Phan Rang as 1966 began. Construction of cantonments and logistic facilities had proceeded at Da Nang Chu Lai, Qui Nhon, Cam Ranh Bay, Phan Rang, and in the Saigon area. COMUSMACV had charged his component commanders with the responsibility for the construction of these facilities, assigning the Army II, III, and IV CTZs, the Navy I CTZ, and the Air Force airfield construction. The MACV J-4 served as the approval agency to assure proper coordination. In the area of port and depot construction, progress was slower in 1965. Additional

1. Unless otherwise stated, information in this chapter is from (~~TS-NOFORN~~ GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 230-321.

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facilities had been planned at Saigon and Cam Ranh Bay, and new ones at Qui Nhon, Da Nang, Chu Lai, Phan Rang, Tuy Hoa, and Vung Tau. But by the end of 1965 only a part of the Cam Ranh Bay project had been completed, and port congestion would continue to be a major problem throughout 1966. In spite of the progress, there was at the beginning of 1966 a construction backlog of 212 battalion months.²

The construction program for RVN did not emerge "full blown" from any single planning action. Rather it began modestly in the late Spring of 1965, but in later months grew by leaps and bounds. The program's growth exceeded all previous planning considerations, and with this growth came many problems. Resources were extremely limited in RVN, and competition developed among construction agents for available materials. This competition led to unnecessary and wasteful practices. By the latter part of 1965, there was an obvious need for more effective management of the overall US construction program to assure optimum use of resources and to respond quickly to new requirements.³

Construction Boss

The Secretary of Defense reviewed the construction situation during his visit to Vietnam in late November 1965, and on his return to Washington he requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consider the requirement for a "construction boss" to supervise all US construction in RVN.⁴

The Joint Chiefs of Staff verified the requirement for a general/flag officer under COMUSMACV "with clearly defined authority and functions for planning and managing the MACV construction program." This officer, titled the "MACV Engineer," would supervise and direct all DOD construction commands and agencies, both military and civilian, in RVN, except for those construction/engineer units organic to or assigned to major combat units. The MACV Engineer would also determine present and future construction requirements and would forecast construction requirements and capabilities for both US troops and contract personnel, as well as for RVNAF and third-country forces. The Joint Chiefs of Staff presented

2. ~~(TS-NOFORN)~~ GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 104-128.

3. ~~(S)~~ GP 4) JCS 2343/724-1, 11 Dec 65, JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65).

4. Ibid.

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their findings to the Secretary of Defense on 20 December 1965 and requested his approval of the MACV Engineer concept.⁵

Both COMUSMACV and CINCPAC agreed with the need for improved coordination and supervision of the MACV construction program, but they preferred continuation of the present arrangement with the MACV J-4 managing the program. COMUSMACV also requested an expansion of his J-4 staff and control over all DOD funds allocated for construction in RVN.⁶

The Secretary of Defense decided in favor of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On 6 January Deputy Secretary Vance approved the establishment of an "engineer construction boss" under COMUSMACV. Mr. Vance specified that the engineer construction boss had full authority to discharge the responsibilities placed upon him and that such authority rested in him and not in the MACV J-4. The MACV Directorate of Construction was activated on 15 February 1966, with Brigadier General C. H. Dunn as the Director of Construction.⁷

Prior to April 1965, programming and funding of the military construction program in Vietnam were accomplished through the standard, line-item, peacetime controls. With the rapid expansion of the construction program after April, modified line-item controls were authorized. This action was an attempt to reduce some of the more restrictive provisions inherent in the peacetime system. Following the approval of the engineer construction boss for Vietnam in January 1966, the Secretary of Defense published new interim construction approval procedures for Vietnam. The new procedures provided for restructuring of the FY 1965 supplemental, the FY 1966, and the FY 1966 supplemental programs into broad functional facility category groups and for control of the restructured programs by COMUSMACV within the approved dollar ceilings. Although these procedures were issued only as interim guidance to serve until the end of the current fiscal year, they apparently continued in effect throughout 1966.⁸

5. (~~C~~-GP 4) JCSM-891-65 to SecDef, 20 Dec 65 (derived from JCS 2343/724-1), JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65).

6. Ibid.

7. (~~C~~-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 6 Jan 66, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/724-1, 17 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (1 Dec 65). (~~IS-NOFORN~~-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, p. 707.

8. (U) JCS 2343/847-1, 23 Jun 66, JMF 9155.3 (7 Jun 66).

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At the 8 July 1966 Honolulu meeting with the Secretary of Defense, CINCPAC presented a status report on construction in RVN. Secretary McNamara felt that the program was too large and too expensive. He requested that CINCPAC "take a hard look" at his requirements and that the Joint Chiefs of Staff review these requirements "most critically" before forwarding them to him.⁹

In accordance with the Secretary of Defense direction, CINCPAC reviewed the RVN construction program and prepared status reports and requirements for the Da Nang, Qui Nhon, Cam Ranh Bay, and Saigon complexes. After studying these reviews, the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed the Secretary of Defense that the requirements defined in the reviews were consistent with the force levels approved in Program #3. The Secretary of Defense apparently found the requirements satisfactory, for he ordered no retrenchments in the RVN construction program.¹⁰

Airfield Construction

The ascending air operations in Vietnam required additional jet-capable fields during 1966. The field that was under construction at Phan Rang as the year began became operational in March. The first tactical fighter squadron (F-4Cs) arrived at Phan Rang on 14 March and flew its first sorties on the following day.¹¹

The Secretary of Defense in November 1965 had authorized the construction of an additional jet airfield in RVN. It took five months for US military authorities, both in Vietnam and Washington, to agree on a site, and it was not until 27 April 1966 that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were able to

9. (TS-GP 4) Memo for Record, 9 Jul 66, Encl to JCS 2339/225, 12 Jul 66, JMF 9155.3 (8 Jul 66).

10. (S-GP 4) Ltrs, CINCPAC to JCS, 17, 20, and 30 Sep 66, Encls to JCS 2343/913, /915, and /913-1; JMF 9155.3/4900 (19 Jul 66) secs 1 and 2. (S-GP 4) JCSM-659-66 to SecDef, 12 Oct 66 (derived from JCS 2339/225-8), JMF 9155.3 (8 Jul 66) sec 2. (S-GP 4) JCSM-698-66 to SecDef, 2 Nov 66 (derived from JCS 2343/913-3), JMF 9155.3/4900 (19 Jul 66) sec 3.

11. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, p. 482. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, p. 725.

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recommend Hue/Phu Bai to the Secretary of Defense as the preferred location for the new field. The Joint Chiefs of Staff requested the Secretary to secure State Department concurrence with this site. Since Ambassador Lodge had objected to the Hue/Phu Bai site because of the political unrest in the area, the Joint Chiefs of Staff proposed Tuy Hoa as an alternate site, although they, COMUSMACV, and CINCPAC all preferred Hue/Phu Bai.¹²

By mid-May there had been no reply from the State Department on the Hue/Phu Bai site. In order to get on with the construction, and to avoid the political problems of the Hue/Phu Bai location, the Joint Chiefs of Staff requested Secretary of Defense approval on 26 May for construction of the field at Tuy Hoa, using Air Force Turnkey procedures (construction by a civilian contractor). Deputy Secretary Vance approved the JCS request on the following day and authorized the Secretary of the Air Force to contract for the Tuy Hoa field.¹³

The Air Force let the contract on 31 May, and CINCPAC was able to deploy the first tactical fighter squadrons to Tuy Hoa in November 1966, though the field did not become fully operational until 1967.¹⁴

Supporting Facilities

Construction of supporting facilities in RVN proceeded at a satisfactory rate in 1966. By the end of the year, the United States had constructed cantonments for 463,500 personnel. In addition, it had completed 10.4 million square feet of warehouses, 36.9 million square feet of open storage, and 5.5 million square feet of ammunition storage. Also finished by the end of 1966 were 26 hospitals (8,240 beds), 280,000 kw

12. (TS-GP 4) JCSM-624-66 to SecDef, 27 Apr 66 (derived from JCS 2343/818), JMF 9155.3 (26 Apr 66).

13. (S-GP 4) JCSM-355-66 to SecDef, 26 May 66 (derived from JCS 2343/828-1); (S-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to SecAF, 27 May 66, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/828-1, 2 Jun 66; JMF 9155.3 (13 May 66).

14. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, p. 725.

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of electrical generating capacity, and \$27.1 million worth of communications facilities.¹⁵

Ports

The most serious hindrance to the development of a logistics base in RVN in 1965 had been the lack of adequate ports. The rapid buildup of men and equipment, coupled with the extensive reliance on coastal shipping for resupply purposes, had quickly overtaxed the already limited RVN port facilities. At the beginning of the US buildup, there were only two deep-draft RVN ports--Saigon and Cam Ranh Bay--and Da Nang with "in-the-stream discharge." During 1965 intensive planning took place for development of the existing ports and construction of a number of new ports, but by the beginning of 1966 only the project at Cam Ranh Bay, providing two additional berths, had been completed. In 1966, however, the results from the earlier planning began to appear as a number of new port facilities became operational. Although the congestion was not eliminated by the end of 1966, the port situation had improved considerably.

In Da Nang the completion of two deep-draft piers, two LST berths, and a 300-foot wharf increased port performance from 88,184 short tons in January to approximately 152,000 short tons in December. An additional deep-draft pier and seven more LST ramps were planned for Da Nang. Chu Lai was improved as a LST port by channel dredging and construction of a turning basin and a four-ship LST ramp. During 1966 a 200-foot barge wharf, a permanent LST ramp, two DeLong cargo piers, and a DeLong ammunition pier were completed at Cam Ranh Bay, increasing the port performance to 153,000 short tons in December. LST and barge facilities were constructed at Nha Trang, raising performance from 9,678 to 21,506 short tons per month. Improvements at Phan Rang and Vung Ro, which supported Tuy Hoa airfield, raised the cargo handling at these ports to 19,174 short tons and 16,072 short tons respectively, in December 1966. A LST ramp and two barge landings were finished at Vung Tau, increasing port performance from 6,000 to 27,000 short tons per month during the year.

15. (S) Rpt, MACV Directorate of Construction, "Observations on the Construction Program, RVN, 1 October 1965 - 1 June 1967," n.d., JMF 911/420 (26 Jul 67) sec 1A.

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The Saigon port complex was the major RVN port, and it had quickly become overloaded in 1965. COMUSMACV had formulated plans for improving the Saigon port, including the construction of an augmenting facility, known as Newport, to handle military cargo. But by the beginning of 1966 few of these facilities had been finished, and COMUSMACV viewed the Saigon port congestion and the resulting supply backlog as his most serious logistics problem in the coming year.

The Saigon port congestion was not solely due solely to inadequate facilities. Poor handling procedures and a lack of coordination with shipping agencies in the United States added to the problem. Ships arrived with mixed-priority cargo, and often low-priority cargo had to be off-loaded onto already crowded piers to get at high-priority cargo. Ships were held at anchorage, fully loaded, for days or weeks as floating storage until the cargoes could be off-loaded. Demurrage fees mounted and vital cargoes did not get to front-line forces in a timely fashion.

By February 1966 there was substantial improvement in the Saigon port. Some additional facilities were completed, terminal service units arrived to assist in port clearing, and a policy of loading for single port discharge was instituted in the United States. As a result, only 9 ships were waiting in port for off-loading in February as compared to 25 in October 1965.

Throughout the early months of 1966 COMUSMACV pressed GVN officials, including the civilian port director, to improve operating procedures. In April a working arrangement between COMUSMACV and the GVN provided that US personnel would clear incoming shipments from the port area to separate customs yards where they could be claimed by commercial importers. This relieved one of the chief problems in the commercial port--movement of cargo off the piers once it was off-loaded from the ships.

In a further effort to relieve the congestion, Washington directed and COMUSMACV prepared in May 1966 a plan for the MACV take-over of the Saigon port, including responsibility for commercial imports. This planning resulted in an agreement between the United States and the GVN on 4 July 1966, transferring from the GVN to COMUSMACV the responsibility for the discharge and clearance through the Saigon port of all AID/Central Purchasing Authority cargo (AID financed commodities consigned to the GVN for use in the counterinsurgency

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program). The agreement did not go as far as the US plan, and COMUSMACV did not assume responsibility for commercial imports. The military handling of AID/Central Purchasing Authority cargo did benefit the commercial port, however, by freeing GVN manpower and equipment for use on commercial cargo.¹⁶

These improvements and the completion of the first facilities at Newport in October partially alleviated the Saigon port situation. But in December a growing labor dispute culminated in a strike of Vietnamese dockworkers and stevedores, and backlogs again built up. As the year ended there was still a serious congestion in the Saigon port. Twenty-nine ships with commercial cargoes were waiting to get into the port.

Again the United States considered a complete take-over of the port to eliminate the congestion. At the Secretary of Defense's direction, COMUSMACV in late December prepared a plan for military control of the Saigon port. The plan, submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 5 January 1967, called for COMUSMACV to assume responsibility for, and operation of, "all commercial water terminal operations" within the Saigon port complex. Although COMUSMACV prepared the plan, he did not favor its implementation. General Westmoreland pointed out that the plan would require US personnel and equipment not available in-country or approved by the Secretary of Defense. He also feared that a US take-over of the civil sector of the port would have adverse political implications, causing loss of popular confidence in the GVN. Ambassador Lodge shared COMUSMACV's concern over the political implications of such a take-over, and the United States pursued the matter no further.¹⁷

Lines of Communication

Secure and efficient lines of communication (LOCs) were essential for the establishment and expansion of a logistics

16. (S-GP 4) Ltr, MACV to CINCPAC, "Saigon Port Operations (U)," JMF 9155.3 (17 May 66).

17. (S) Msg, DEF 9408 to JCS, 2 Dec 66; (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9507 to CINCPAC, 3 Dec 66; (S-GP 4) Ltr, MACV to JCS, "Saigon Port Plan," 5 Jan 67; JMF 9155.3 (17 May 66) sec 2. (S) Msg, Saigon 17376 to State, 6 Feb 67, JCS IN 86868.

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base. In RVN, ground LOCs--railroads and highways--played a minor part in the development of the US logistics base in 1965 and 1966. The VC control of large areas of SVN prevented any effective use of either roads or railroads. What segments of land LOCs were available led from nowhere to nowhere, were in poor repair, and were subject to constant VC interdiction. The nature of the military operations in Vietnam, with the absence of defined battlelines and rear-unit boundaries, also limited the use of ground LOCs.

The Vietnamese National Railroad System (VNRS), which was limited to the coastal areas, was operative in 1966 only for 100 kilometers between Hue and Da Nang, for about 200 kilometers around Cam Ranh Bay, and for 50 kilometers to the northeast from Saigon. In May 1966 COMUSMACV developed an ambitious plan to restore control and operation of the VNRS. But in the remaining six months of 1966, little progress was made in implementing the plan.

The RVN highway system was in much the same condition as the VNRS. Even those highways considered to be open were in poor repair and subject to VC interdiction. There was little long-distance movement of supplies by highway in 1966, and it was not until 1967 that COMUSMACV launched a determined effort to restore and secure RVN highways.

The lack of reliable ground LOCs caused extensive reliance on airlift to move supplies within the RVN. The major source of airlift was C-130 aircraft and USAF and Royal Australian Air Force Caribous. Some indication of the role of the C-130 in Vietnam is seen in the fact that, by the end of 1966, 75 new C-130-capable airfields had been constructed in RVN.¹⁸

The other principal means for moving supplies was intra-coastal shipping. The rapid buildup in 1965 severely overburdened available shallow-draft vessels. In late 1965 the Commander, Military Sea Transport System, Far East, provided seven LSTs, and the Secretary of Defense authorized a contract with the Alaska Barge and Transport Company (AB&T) to provide additional intracoastal shipping. The contract was signed on 8 December 1965, and the first AB&T flotilla arrived off RVN

¹⁸ (C) Rpt, MACV Directorate of Construction, "Observation on the Construction Program, RVN, 1 October 1965 - 1 June 1967," n.d., JMF 911/420 (26 Jul 67).

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in March. By early May 1966, 49 AB&T vessels were moving cargo between RVN ports. The construction of additional LST facilities in the various RVN ports during 1966 permitted better utilization of LST assets, and the shallow-draft shipping picture had improved significantly by the end of 1966.¹⁹

Supply

Another important area in the development of a logistics base in RVN was the establishment of a system of supply. During the rapid 1965 buildup, supply procedures had evolved to meet needs rather than as the result of an orderly preplanned system. With this evolutionary development had come many problems.

A Common Supply System. Out of the many supply problems grew the idea for a common supply system. This concept envisioned a single supply system for all US and third-country forces in RVN in place of the current system where each Service supplied its own forces, often with duplication of effort. The Joint Chiefs of Staff studied the logistic support for operations in RVN during the Summer of 1965 and recommended to the Secretary of Defense on 19 October 1965 the establishment of a common supply system. They favored assigning to the Department of the Army responsibility for development and implementation, in coordination with CINCPAC and the other Services, of a single supply system for all US, RVNAF, and third-country forces in RVN. The Secretary of Defense recognized the need for a single supply system for common items and, on 9 November 1965, requested the Army to prepare an appropriate time-phased plan for such a system. Secretary McNamara specified that funding for the system should be on a common-service (nonreimbursable) basis, as opposed to a cross-service (reimbursable) basis.²⁰

19. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp. 120-121. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, p. 732.

20. (S-GP 4) Joint Staff Study, "Responsive Logistic Support for Combined Operations in the Republic of Vietnam," Aug 65, JMF 4060 (8 Jan 65) sec 1A. (S-GP 4) JCSM-763-65 to SecDef, 19 Oct 65 (derived from JCS 2315/349-8); (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 9 Nov 65, Encl to JCS 2315/349-9, 12 Nov 65; JMF 4060 (8 Jan 65) sec 2.

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The Chief of Staff, Army, prepared the required plan and submitted it to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 14 January 1966. It provided for the development of supply requirements, programming, budgeting, funding, and provision of designated supplies through "a single integrated logistic system," to be operated by the US Army in support of all US, RVN, and third-country forces in RVN. The plan presented three alternatives as to the scope and range of items to be included in the system. The first alternative included 20,000 line items; the second had a potential of 1.4 million line items; and the third was the same as the second with the addition of approximately 2,000 Army-managed major end items. The plan called for implementation of the system in three phases: an initial phase to begin on 1 March 1966, covering subsistence, general supplies, special service material, and clothing (items currently handled by HSAS), plus packaged POL products; an intermediate phase, beginning about 1 January 1967, with an expanded range and scope of coverage consistent with the capabilities and resources made available to the Army; and a possible final phase, to be implemented if the size of the operations required it, in which case the Army would establish in RVN an element of a theater logistic organization with direct access to CONUS supply sources.²¹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded the Army plan to the Secretary of Defense on 4 February, recommending implementation of the initial phase. They also recommended that supplies included in the system be furnished on the basis of reimbursement at the departmental level. The Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Secretary that the Army was developing detailed resource requirements for the three alternatives and that, upon receipt of this information, they would recommend further implementation of the common supply system.²²

On 28 March the Secretary of Defense approved the implementation of the initial phase of the Army plan. He directed that the system be operated on a cross-service funding (reimbursement) basis, tasking the Department of the Army to develop, in coordination with the other Services, a

21. (~~S~~-GP 4) DA Plan for Common Supply Support in RVN, 12 Jan 66, Att to CSAM 13-66 to JCS, 14 Jan 66, Encl to JCS 2315/349-11, 14 Jan 66, JMF 4060 (8 Jan 65).

22. (~~S~~-GP 4) JCSM-64-66 to SecDef, 4 Feb 66 (derived from JCS 2315/349-12), same file, sec 3.

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cross-service funding procedure that would meet legal requirements without being unduly burdensome. He also directed that movements and other logistic services furnished by one US Service to another within RVN should be on a common-service funding (without reimbursement) basis.²³

Following this approval, the Army established and began operation of a common supply system in Vietnam. Supply support in the categories of subsistence, packaged petroleum products, and general housekeeping supplies was furnished to US forces in the II, III, and IV CTZ. Supply support was also provided to third country forces as specified in appropriate country-to-country agreements. By Summer the Army was planning to extend the common supply system to I CTZ.²⁴

CINCPAC opposed this extension. He believed that the current Navy-operated supply system was providing responsive support for the forces then in I CTZ. He saw no reason to change the mode of support, particularly since the Navy system was geared to support of the Marines--the principal forces in I CTZ.²⁵

The Joint Chiefs of Staff, however, considered that the benefits to be gained by the extension of the common supply system into I CTZ outweighed the objections. Consequently on 22 September they directed CINCPAC to implement the initial phase of the common supply system in I CTZ with a target date of 1 January 1967. They did allow CINCPAC some leeway to adjust this date as necessary in order to insure uninterrupted supply support.²⁶

The Joint Chiefs of Staff on 22 September 1966 forwarded to the Secretary of Defense time-phasing and resource requirement annexes to the Army plan for the common supply system. After discussing the three alternatives presented in the annexes, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended approval of the first alternative. This alternative provided for an increased

23. (GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS et al., 28 Mar 66, Encl to JCS 2315/349-13, 3 Mar 66, same file, sec 3.

24. (GP 4) Memo, SecA to SecDef, 11 Aug 66, Encl to JCS 2315/349-17, 16 Aug 66, same file, sec 4.

25. (GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 23 Jul 66, JCS IN 13783. (GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 5 Aug 66, JCS IN 35833.

26. (GP 4) SM-777-66 to CINCPAC, 22 Sep 66 (derived from JCS 2315/349-20), JMF 4060 (8 Jan 65) sec 4.

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range of common-item support to a total of 25,000 DSA/GSA items, beginning on 1 July 1967 with full implementation by 31 December 1967.²⁷

Before the Secretary of Defense replied, he reviewed the current common supply system as implemented by the Army. He recognized that progress was being made in establishing stock control procedures, but felt that these procedures were not sufficiently advanced to permit a large expansion of the system at that time.

Consequently, on 12 December 1966, he told the Secretaries of the Military Departments and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, that, although the objectives of the common supply system remained valid as long-term goals, the system must be limited for the immediate future. He restricted the common supply system to the current coverage (subsistence, packaged POL products, and limited-range housekeeping materials) plus the addition of a full range of medical supplies. The Secretary also directed that the system be expanded into the I CTZ not later than 1 April 1967. The Joint Chiefs of Staff subsequently revised their instructions to CINCPAC which had set the date as 1 January 1967.

Secretary McNamara did not believe that this delay in expanding the scope of the common supply system needed to inhibit planning for "early extension," and he directed such planning to continue. He added that details could be worked out between himself and the Secretaries of the Military Department without the direct involvement of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.²⁸

Petroleum. The initiation of the limited common supply system did not resolve all supply problems in RVN, and it had no effect at all on the important areas of petroleum and ammunition. The supply of petroleum was a problem of storage and transport, rather than availability. As US operations had expanded in RVN in 1965, the need for petroleum had increased in proportion, and POL consumption nearly doubled in 1966.

27. (S-GP 4) JCSM-604-66 to SecDef, 22 Sep 66 (derived from JCS 2315/349-20), same file.

28. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to Secys of Mil Depts and CJCS, 12 Dec 66, Encl to JCS 2315/349-23, 15 Dec 66, same file.

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In January 1966, 1,346,000 barrels were consumed and this figure rose to 2,592,300 barrels by December 1966.

In the Spring of 1965 the principal bulk POL storage in RVN was restricted to the commercial facilities at Nha Be. Great efforts were made during 1965 to increase storage capability. By the beginning of 1966 the total in-country commercial storage capability stood at 880,000 barrels (60 percent of which was utilized for military requirements) and the military storage capacity totaled 382,300 barrels. Only 30 percent of the military storage capacity was permanent. The remainder consisted of collapsible tanks, tanks on barges, and ocean tankers at offshore anchor. The goal for 1966 was not only to increase the storage capacity to meet the expanding needs, but also to reduce and eventually eliminate offshore storage. During the year additional storage facilities were built at Tan Son Nhut, Bien Hoa, Cam Ranh Bay, Vien Loi, and Vung Tau. By May onshore capacity was roughly 692,000 barrels, and by the end of the year it had risen to 1,586,000 barrels--an increase of 229 percent. Offshore discharge facilities were greatly improved in 1966 with the construction of additional pipelines and pumping facilities. As a result, the discharge rate grew from 600 barrels per hour early in the year to approximately 6,000 barrels per hour by the end of the year.

The Air Ammunition Problem. Among the most urgent supply problems that arose in Southeast Asia during 1966 was a shortage of air-to-ground munitions. This shortage adversely affected air operations in RVN, Laos, and NVN and required strong remedial measures to prevent it from doing even greater damage to the air effort. Although authorities in the theater seemed to have been aware that various factors, particularly increased sortie rates and deployment of additional air squadrons, were leading up to a shortage of air munitions in late 1965 and early 1966, Washington officials were taken almost completely by surprise when the emergency actually materialized in April 1966.

Admiral Sharp informed Secretary McNamara on 26 January that increased requirements would probably cause shortages in air munitions during the coming year. He was considering measures to limit ARC LIGHT sorties and to improve target selection procedures. He believed, however, that if

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deliveries of "programmed bomb production" stayed on schedule the problem would be eliminated by the beginning of 1967.²⁹

By 1 March the predicted shortages had developed and according to a COMUSMACV report, air munitions were becoming "critically short generally." When he visited Saigon on 3 April, Deputy Secretary of Defense Vance learned that the air munitions shortage was critical and that production could not meet requirements before early 1967. Bomb loads of strike aircraft were being reduced and substitute munitions were being used. Secretary Vance was advised that only 73 percent of the required bomb assets and only 33 percent of the CBU-2 assets were available.³⁰

The full impact of these shortages was not realized in Washington until 8 April, when General Westmoreland described to CINCPAC and General Wheeler the seriousness of the shortages and their effects on his operations. "The lack of USAF aircraft munitions in SEA has reached the point where I consider it an emergency situation," General Westmoreland stated. He said that all possible actions had been taken in the theater, including emergency airlift, to redistribute resources. Despite these actions it had been necessary within the past four days to cancel or not schedule 233 strike sorties. Additionally, because substitute weapons had been used, the effectiveness of the sorties flown had been reduced. The shortage was so acute that, when recent munition shipments had been delayed, missions had been cancelled. "Your immediate intervention is requested," General Westmoreland concluded.³¹

General Westmoreland's message caused considerable consternation in Washington. Secretary of Defense McNamara informed COMUSMACV on the same day that he was "shocked by the evidence of maldistribution of air ordnance," and that immediate action would be taken to assure the supplies of munitions that were needed. The Secretary named Assistant Secretary of Defense (I&L) Paul Ignatius to head up a high level task force to analyze and solve the munitions problem

29. (TS) Msg, CINCPAC to SecDef, 290445Z Jan 66, JCS IN 75183.

30. (TS NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 256.

31. (TS-GP 4) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC and CJCS, 8 Apr 66, JCS IN 14720.

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and directed that he meet at once in Hawaii with representatives of CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, and the Services.³²

As a short-range action designed to alleviate the immediate shortage, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized CINCPAC on 8 April to divert and commit to operations in Southeast Asia, for the use of any of his components, "appropriate air munitions resources in PACOM" regardless of ownership. They specifically authorized him as a temporary measure to take over reserves being held in support of US Forces in Korea.³³

With regard to the Hawaii conference on air munitions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that detailed requirements would be developed and matched against assets and production. "Various options to cut pattern to cloth will be examined," the Joint Chiefs of Staff informed CINCPAC.³⁴

On the next day Secretary McNamara cautioned CINCPAC that cutting the "pattern to the cloth" did not mean that he was to plan to curtail necessary operations in anticipation of future munitions shortages.³⁵

Although Secretary McNamara had indicated that the shortage of air munitions stemmed from "maldistribution", the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the air ammunition problem was occasioned by four main factors: 1) inadequate production; 2) problems in the ammunition pipeline to Southeast Asia; 3) distribution within Southeast Asia; 4) the level of sorties in Southeast Asia. The shortage was not so much in gross tonnages of bombs, which on the surface seemed adequate, but shortages, of types of bombs and bomb and rocket components. In certain types of munitions, for example, a commander might have 1,000 bombs of which only one-third had all essential components, with parts such as tail cones, fuzes, or arming wires not available for the remainder.

32. (TS) Msg, DEF 8036 to COMUSMACV, 8 Apr 66.

33. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8037 to CINCPAC, 8 Apr 66

34. Ibid.

35. (TS-GP 4) Msg, DEF 8126 to CINCPAC, 9 Apr 66.

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On 14 April the Joint Chiefs of Staff delegated to CINCPAC full authority to assign nonnuclear air munitions, and adjust resources, among his component commanders, the allied forces, and CINCSAC's B-52 forces. Further, the Joint Chiefs of Staff directed him to: 1) establish base operating stock levels to be maintained by his component commanders and CINCSAC forces in PACOM; 2) establish consumption rates consistent with available munitions; and 3) adjust tasks and missions for component commanders and ARC LIGHT forces accordingly.³⁶

The Hawaii air munitions conference took place on 11 and 12 April. Considerable delay was encountered in assembling valid production and asset data, a development that "inhibited" the allocation of munitions among the users. Six courses of action were finally decided upon: 1) development of realistic sortie plans, by month, weapon, and Service; 2) provision of operating stock levels; 3) increase of WESTPAC stocks by drawing down on CONUS stocks; 4) provision of better management for production of bomb components; 5) establishment of a realistic pipeline; 6) acceleration of production. After the conference the Secretary of Defense on 15 April released significant USN and USAF assets in the CONUS and authorized priority shipment to Southeast Asia.³⁷

On his return from the Hawaii conference, Assistant Secretary Ignatius established a central office, the Air Munitions Office, using key members of his own staff and experts furnished by the Services to develop, oversee, coordinate, and expedite measures designed to eliminate the air munitions shortages. This office was particularly concerned with production priorities and distribution problems.³⁸

36. (TS-GP 4) Msg, JCS 8558 to CINCPAC, CINCSAC, 14 Apr 66. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, p. 758.

37. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, p. 759. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 258.

38. Interv, James F. Schnabel with CDR Bruce W. Robertson, J-4, 25 Feb 68.

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Analysis of the problem and the adoption of emergency measures did not immediately improve the situation. Hundreds of sorties were canceled or not scheduled in April because of lack of proper ordnance. Extensive transfers of certain types of ammunition were made between Services and among various locations. Only the most lucrative and pressing targets were scheduled for attack, and stringent measures were put into effect in the theater to conserve air ammunition.³⁹

CINCPAC, despite the JCS authorization of 8 April, denied on 22 April a CINCPACAF request to withdraw war reserve munitions from Korea for use in Southeast Asia. He feared that such action would yield few benefits and might have adverse political effects.⁴⁰

On 24 April CINCPAC submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff his plan for air munitions distribution and consumption during the remainder of 1966. It provided for transfer of CINCLANT, CONUS Navy, and CONUS Air Force stocks to CINCPAC as directed by the Secretary of Defense, and included production information that was forecast as of that date. CINCPAC allocated, by area and Service, combat sorties for which air-to-ground munitions were required, based on the capability of squadrons either deployed or approved for deployment. CINCPAC had by now been allocated all available CONUS-based air munitions, which were being moved to him in accordance with his requests. His future plans would have to depend on production. Although at the 11-12 April Hawaii conference CINCPAC had accepted as satisfactory for planning a loading factor of 1.66 tons of ordnance per sortie, it now appeared that, owing to the shortages, a somewhat lesser loading factor would have to be used. CINCPAC noted that he had the choice of either light-loaded sorties or fewer sorties with full loads. He had decided not to reduce the number of sorties, but would accept underloading.⁴¹

In a further effort to alleviate ammunition shortages, the President, at the request of the Secretary of Defense, designated eight critical ammunition items on 26 April "as being in the highest national priority category." The eight

39. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 256-258.

40. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, p. 760.

41. (S) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 24 Apr 66, JCS IN 41461, JMF 9155 (24 Apr 66).

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items included three bomb categories (MK-81, MK-82, and M-117) and the 2.75 rocket.⁴²

On 2 May CINCPAC provided the Joint Chiefs of Staff his plan for tactical aircraft sortie requirements and capabilities in Southeast Asia for the period April-December 1966. After reviewing CINCPAC's 24 April and 2 May submissions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Secretary of Defense on 10 May a capability plan for Southeast Asia. The plan covered the remainder of the year and consisted of a Southeast Asia combat sortie program, a supporting monthly air munitions expenditure plan, and an air munitions requirements and expenditure summary. The plan was designed to make the best possible use of available ammunition resources while maintaining an optimum sortie rate without resorting to under-loading.⁴³

On the same day, 10 May, the Joint Chiefs of Staff told CINCPAC that, with reference to his intention to employ light-loaded sorties if necessary to continue programmed sortie rates, he should follow a policy of "requiring full use of aircraft capabilities whenever such use will provide the optimum return for effort expended."⁴⁴

The Secretary of Defense approved the JCS capability plan on 24 May as the sortie plan for the remainder of 1966.⁴⁵

To speed ammunition deliveries to RVN, the Assistant Secretary of Defense (I&L) requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Military Departments on 23 June to reduce the current pipeline time for air munitions to Southeast Asia from 90 to 60 days during the period July through September.

42. (S-GP 4) NSAM No. 346 to SecDef et al., 26 Apr 66, Encl to JCS 1725/593-1, 28 Apr 66, JMF 4000 (16 Apr 66).

43. (S-GP 4) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 2 May 66, JCS IN 53911, JMF 9155 (24 Apr 66). (TS-GP 4) JCSM-317-66 to SecDef, 10 May 66, Encl to JCS 2343/823, 5 May 66, same file.

44. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 1498 to CINCPAC, 10 May 66, same file.

45. (TS-GP 3) JCS 2343/760-69, 28 Jun 66, JMF 9155.3 (24 Jan 66) sec 11.

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Both the Joint Chiefs and the Services, subsequently, took appropriate action to implement this request.⁴⁶

Despite the various actions taken in April, May, and June to improve the ammunition situation in RVN, the situation continued to deteriorate until mid-year. In late June the list of air ammunition items in short supply had grown to 13 (as compared with one in December 1965). It included nearly every type of conventional air ordnance, and the overall stockage levels in the Seventh Air Force had fallen to 15 days--against a 45-day objective.⁴⁷ When Secretary McNamara visited CINCPAC headquarters on 8 July, he was briefed on the current status of the air munitions shortage. He learned that although "every productive action" was being taken, CINCPAC had not yet been able fully to regulate and adjust the distribution of available assets. Of 44,000 tons of bombs scheduled for expenditure in June, only about 37,000 tons had been actually dropped. Although the gross tonnage in possession of the commanders was correct, the right ordnance was not available to the operating squadrons in time to be used as planned.⁴⁸

From this point on the situation began to improve. Accelerated production in CONUS and increased ammunition inventories in WESTPAC permitted the overall stockage levels in the Seventh Air Force to reach 20 days by 15 July and 30 days by 15 August. By early September the United States had over 130,000 tons of air munitions on hand in Southeast Asia, with an additional 114,000 tons in transit. Because consumption for July and August had not exceeded 45,000 tons per month, the United States had on hand a 90-day supply of

46. (U) Memo, ASD(I&L) to Secys of Mil Depts and CJCS, 23 Jun 66, Encl to JCS 2343/853-1, 24 Jun 66; (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 5297 to CSA, CNO, CSAF, CMC, and CINCPAC, 24 Jun 66; (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 9796 to CSA et al., 23 Aug 66 (derived from JCS 1672/328-1); JMF 9155.3 (21 Jun 66).

47. The 2d Air Division was renamed the Seventh Air Force in March 1966.

48. (S) CINCPAC Briefing for SecDef, 8 Jul 66, JMF 9155.3 (6 Jul 66). (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History 1966, p. 260.

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air munitions. In addition, each succeeding month saw the production of more air munitions than were consumed.⁴⁹

By late 1966 the Southeast Asia ammunition situation had improved remarkably. In a review of air munitions distribution on 5 November, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, informed the Secretary of Defense that, although overall consumption in tons in Southeast Asia was still less than planned, consumption on an item basis of preferred munitions was at or near CINCPAC's requirements. The Chairman did not consider, however, that the situation justified any reduction in air munitions production at this time. The Chairman noted that once CINCPAC's continuing consumption requirements had been satisfied, other theater and Service inventories that had been drawn down to low levels would be reconstituted. The Joint Chiefs of Staff had also instituted a number of actions to assure that the Southeast Asia air munitions inventory and the "future flow" did not exceed both CINCPAC's requirements and his capacity to receive and store munitions. CINCPAC, the Joint Staff, and the Services, in conjunction with the I&L Munitions Office, continued to monitor closely actual versus planned shipment and consumption. In conformance with Secretary of Defense guidance, the Military Departments programmed air munitions not required for Southeast Asia to meet other worldwide shortages or to build up Service war reserve stocks.⁵⁰

M-16 Rifle. In 1966 the M-16 (M16E1) rifle was first issued to US forces in Vietnam. The M-16 was an accurate, high-velocity automatic weapon; it was lightweight, weighing less than six pounds, and was easy to maintain; and since it functioned easily and resisted the corrosive effects of the jungle climate, it quickly became a favorite of the troops throughout RVN. The issuance of the M-16 made it possible to eliminate the M-1 and the M-14 rifle, the M-1 and the M-2 carbine, the Browning automatic rifle, and the submachine gun from the ground force inventories in RVN.

49. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 29 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 1725/621, 4 Oct 66, JMF 9155 (8 Aug 66). (~~TS~~ ~~NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 260-265.

50. (S-GP 4) CM-1887-66 to SecDef, 5 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 1725/621-1, 8 Nov 66, JMF 9155 (8 Aug 66).

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At COMUSMACV's request, the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 10 January approved the issue of M-16s to forces in RVN. Since the existing stock of M-16s was limited, a contract was let for the production of an additional 100,000 M-16s during 1966. At the same time the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved expansion of production and funding to provide the necessary 5.56mm ball ammunition to support the M-16. An additional 123,000 M-16s with supporting ammunition were included in the FY 1966 Supplemental Appropriation request.⁵¹

In August 1966 COMUSMACV issued the first M-16s to the RVNAF and third-country forces in RVN. He allotted the RVNAF, ROKFV, and PHILCAG each 170 M-16s for training purposes, and in September he issued 200 M-16s to the Australians and 20 to the New Zealand forces, plus 1,410 additional M-16s to the RVNAF, ROKFV, and PHILCAG. The replacement of the M-14 with the M-16 slowed down in the Fall of 1966 owing to production difficulties in 5.56mm ball ammunition. This difficulty was expected to be overcome in early 1967, when approximately 100 million rounds per month were expected to be available.⁵²

Resupply

Following the decision to commit combat forces in Vietnam, the United States introduced combat forces and service units into RVN at a rapid pace, often faster than the supporting logistical base could expand. This created serious problems of resupply, and several high priority supply procedures were established to expedite the movement of critical items, such as repair parts. With the beginning of the buildup, COMUSMACV had anticipated many supply shortages and had requested the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CINCPAC to require new units arriving in RVN to be self-sustaining for a period of 180 days after arrival. To meet this requirement, CINCPAC developed the PUSH system to provide 180 days of automatic resupply of all items, except bulk POL, for divisions, brigades, combat support, and combat service support units deployed to RVN. Supplies were "pushed" from CONUS to units,

51. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 1281 to CINCPAC, 10 Jan 66.
(S-GP 4) JCSM-110-66 to CSA et al., 29 Apr 66, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2349/49, 4 May 66, JMF 4630 (29 Mar 66).

52. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 3727 to CINCPAC et al., 27 Sep 66.
(S-GP 4) JCSM-325-66 to CSA et al., 7 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/15-1, 9 Nov 66, JMF 4630 (29 Mar 66).

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in 15-day increments, to support them until they began receiving supply in response to their own requisitions. Initially PUSH stocks were delivered directly to the supported unit. However, because the units normally had limited storage capabilities, the policy was modified so that the first two 15-day increments went directly to the units and the remaining ten to supporting depots. By March 1966 the overall logistics posture in RVN had developed to the point where some items could be eliminated from automatic resupply and the number of days of supply required for other items could be reduced.

To assist COMUSMACV in the area of resupply, the Secretary of Defense in August 1965 established a task force in his office to monitor critical shortages and inventories of US military equipment and supplies, and to institute and expedite corrective action. This task force, the Vietnam Expediting Task Force (VNETF), set up a reporting system, called Flag Pole, to keep it informed of current shortages.

The Secretary of Defense disestablished VNETF and the Flag Pole system on 15 August 1966. During its year of existence VNETF bridged an important gap during the first stages of the US buildup. It also centralized management of the more serious problems during the period when the logistical system was still in initial development.

The individual Services also devised procedures to expedite resupply of their forces. With Secretary of Defense authorization, the Department of the Army established the Red Ball Express system in early December 1965 as a temporary method to expedite the flow of repair parts to RVN. The main features of the system were streamlined requisition procedures and reserved (predictable) airlift capability. The Red Ball Express began on 6 December 1965. Between that date and 6 January 1966 approximately 8,000 requests were submitted, and 3,700 were filed. This allowed 612 major items of equipment to be removed from deadline, including 481 aircraft.

Subsequently, the other Services established similar special procedures to expedite resupply. The Marine Corps also called its system the Red Ball Express. It operated somewhat differently from the Army Red Ball, but served essentially the same ends.

The Air Force called its system Speed Through Air Resupply (STAR). Under STAR, a forward base in RVN

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requisitioned command-designated items (aircraft, vehicles, generators, spare parts, etc.) from a single CONUS depot. Each weapon system or commodity group operated through one specified depot in CONUS; this depot received requisitions, provided funding, and initiated follow-up actions.

Transfer of MAP and AID Responsibilities

During 1966 the Department of Defense assumed responsibility for a number of functions in RVN which had formerly been under other programs or agencies. The most significant of these was the support of the RVNAF and third-country forces in RVN. Although the commitment of US combat forces in RVN shifted US attention to combat operations, the MAP support for the RVNAF continued. The expansion of operations during 1965 led to a need for increases in RVNAF strengths, and, consequently, successive increases in MAP funding. In addition, the MAP also supported the growing third-country forces in RVN. As a result, the FY 1965 RVN MAP grew from an originally planned \$214.9 million to \$372.5 million, and the planned FY 1966 MAP expanded in proportion.⁵³

In December 1965 the Secretary of Defense decided that the time had come to transfer funding for RVNAF and third-country support from the MAP to the budgets of the Military Departments. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, in collaboration with the appropriate Assistant Secretaries of Defense, the Services, CINCPAC, and COMUSMACV, developed a concept to accomplish this transfer. The concept, submitted to the Secretary of Defense on 3 March 1966, assumed that the Secretary of Defense would transfer to the Military Departments the unexpended balance of MAP FY 1966 funds as of 31 March 1966. The concept provided that the Services would "plan, program, budget, and fund" for the support of the RVNAF and third-country forces in RVN.⁵⁴

The Deputy Secretary of Defense approved the JCS concept on 25 March (revising this approval on 16 April), and on the same day the President signed the FY 1966 Supplemental Authorizations and Appropriations Act. Effective with the signing

53. (TS-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1965, pp 128-131.

54. (S-GP 4) JCSM-137-66 to SecDef, 3 Mar 66 (derived from JCS 2343/741-1), JMF 9155.3 (23 Dec 65).

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of this act, the Services assumed responsibility for support of the RVNAF and third-country forces in RVN. It was not possible, however, to adjust the complex MAP administrative machinery so arbitrarily, and the development of the formal Service procedures to carry out this new responsibility stretched out over the next year and a half.⁵⁵

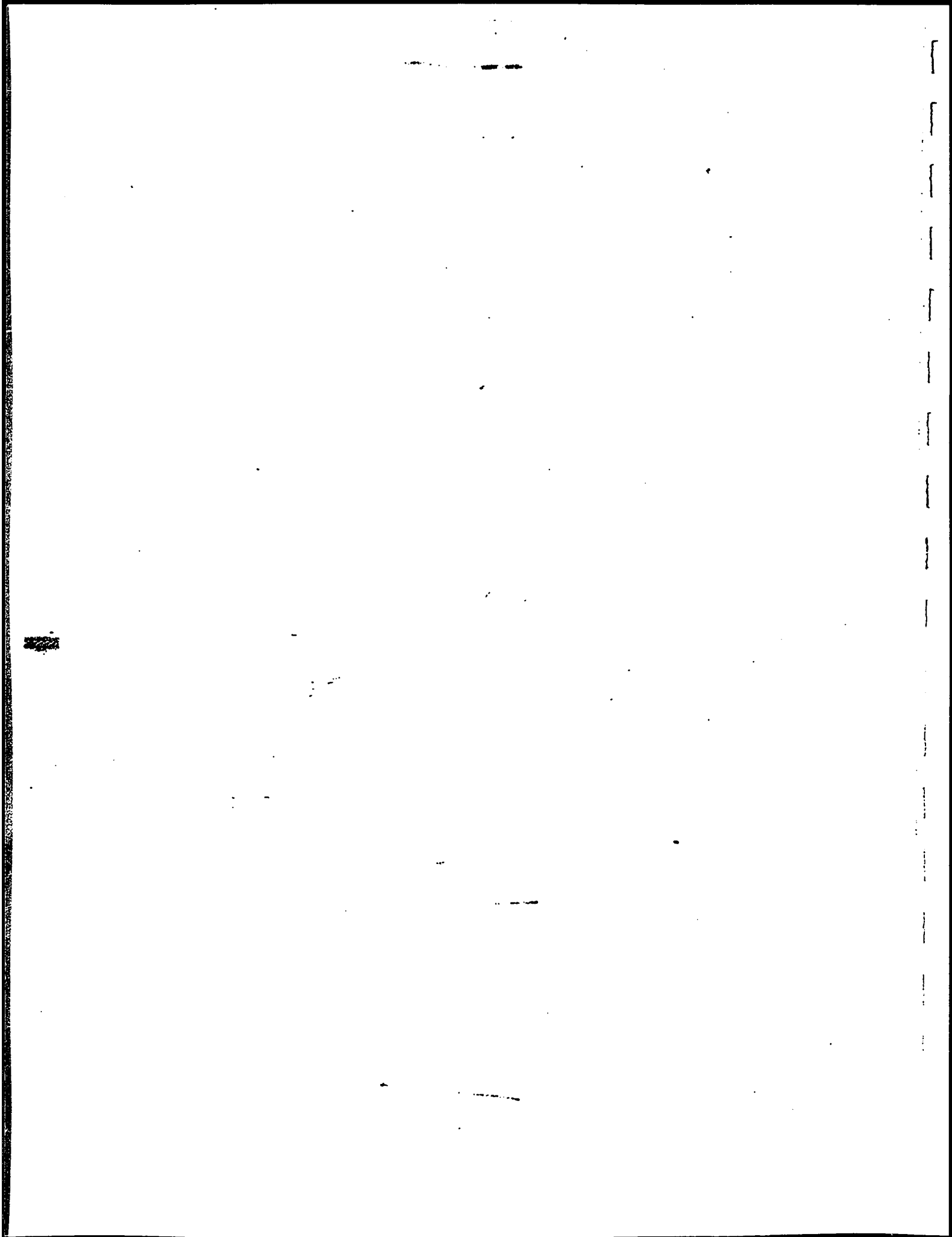
On 30 November the Secretary of Defense assigned to various DOD elements responsibility for certain programs in RVN that had previously been performed by AID. These programs included several specific measures to improve port congestion, civic action programs, and railway sabotage replacement; the conduct of a cadastral survey of An Giang Province; commodity support for the GVN police; highway maintenance; refugee assistance; air traffic control; electrification; military affairs in revolutionary development; and Vietnam television. The DOD assumption of responsibility was retroactive to 1 July 1966. In cases where AID had incurred costs since 1 July, the DOD would reimburse AID at the local (Vietnam) level.⁵⁶

By the end of 1966 the United States had greatly expanded its logistics base in RVN to meet the vastly increased requirements. This base would have to be further developed and refined in the coming 18 months to meet further increases in US forces, but this expansion would not be of the scale required in 1965 and 1966. Certain problems were still unresolved. These included additional port construction, the alleviation of port congestion, and the securing and opening of road and railroads for the land movement of men and supplies. These were matters that would be pursued in the coming months.

55. (~~S~~-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 25 Mar 66, Encl to JCS 2343/741-2, 29 Mar 66; (~~S~~-GP 4) Memo, DepSecDef to CJCS, 16 Apr 66, Encl to JCS 2343/741-3, 20 Apr 66; JMF 9155.3 (23 Dec 65). (~~TS NOTORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History 1966, p. 287.

56. (U) Memo, SecDef to Secys of Mil Depts, CJCS, and Dir DSA, 30 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/968, 30 Nov 66, JMF 7300 (30 Nov 66).

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Chapter 38

THE GVN-1966

The beginning of 1966 found the GVN in a relatively stable position. The military government headed by Chairman Thieu and Prime Minister Ky had been in office since June 1965 without a major coup and was cooperating closely with the United States in the war effort. But this outward semblance of stability belied a number of fundamental sources of trouble, any one of which could erupt and threaten the fragile Thieu-Ky government. Among these sources of trouble, many of them interrelated, were a basic feeling of dissatisfaction toward the military junta, especially on the part of out-of-power politicians and the Buddhists; an uneasy relationship among the senior officers composing the ruling National Leadership Committee (NLC); an increasing tension between "northerners" and "southerners" within the government; political differences between Catholics and Buddhists; and a worsening economic situation.¹

In mid-January, Premier Ky outlined to the Second Armed Forces Congress, composed of over 1,400 senior RVNAF officers, the major objectives of his government in 1966. These included winning the war, pacifying the countryside, and reconstructing rural areas; stabilization of the economic situation; and the building of democracy in RVN. Ky emphasized that the armed forces had seized power, not with the intention of clinging to it, but to create the necessary conditions for the establishment of true democracy. GVN officials, however, had already indicated to the United States that this might be a lengthy process since the NLC opposed free elections for a national assembly at this critical juncture of the war. Instead, the NLC proposed only to appoint a "Democracy-Building Council" to draft a constitution and appropriate statutes concerning political parties and elections.²

1. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 598.

2. Ibid., pp. 598-599. (C) Msg, Saigon 2463 to State, 10 Jan 66. (U) Msg, Saigon 2544 to State, 15 Jan 66.

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In an effort to demonstrate US confidence in the GVN, President Johnson decided in early February to meet with GVN leaders to review both the military and non-military situation in Vietnam. The President, with his Secretaries of State, Defense, Agriculture, and Health, Education, and Welfare met with Generals Thieu and Ky during the period 6-8 February in Honolulu. This conference produced a joint communique and declaration reaffirming the broad purposes of the two governments and their common commitment "to defense against aggression, to the work of social revolution, to the goal of free self-government, to the attack on hunger, ignorance, and disease, and to the unending quest for peace."³

Political Developments

The Honolulu Conference inspired the Thieu-Ky government with more self-confidence than was warranted by the popular support it enjoyed in the country. The result was a confrontation between the GVN and the Buddhists. The Buddhists, who represented between two and four million in a population of 16 million, had on several occasions already demonstrated their zeal and obstructive capacities in political affairs. Politically minded Buddhists, most of whom were associated with the Unified Buddhist Association, were antipathetic to the Thieu-Ky military government, unenthusiastic about the war, and resentful of what they called the "overlordship" of the United States.⁴

The event that sparked the new struggle with Buddhists was a cabinet reshuffle announced by Prime Minister Ky on 21 February. The reshuffle, which included the addition of two ministries to meet military economic requirements and to pursue the programs decided upon at Honolulu, would have strengthened the government by adding young energetic southerners, but the Buddhists found the changes unacceptable. Thich Tam Chau, Director of the Buddhist Secular

3. (U) Dept of State Bulletin, LIV (28 Feb 66), pp. 305-307.

4. Richard P. Stebbins, The United States in World Affairs, 1966 (1967), p. 41. (S-NOFORN-GP 1) DIA/JCS Southeast Asia Military Fact Book, Jan 67, DIAI Sup 3-67, p. A-9.

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Affairs Institute in Saigon, felt the changes favored the Catholics, and initially intended to follow a watch-and-see policy, but eventually became involved in the struggle. Thich Tri Quang, the leading bonze in Central Vietnam, began action against the GVN in Hue. This began a struggle that was to reach almost the proportions of a civil war, to hinder military operations, and to plague the government until late June.⁵

The Government's confrontation with the Buddhists deepened when Ky relieved I Corps Commander, General Nguyen Chanh Thi, on 10 March for failure to obey orders. Thi, widely regarded as a potential rival of Ky, enjoyed great popularity in I CTZ, and his relief precipitated an immediate reaction. On the following day 2,000 persons demonstrated in Da Nang, chanting "Down with the Generals' Command in Saigon." In succeeding days, the demonstrations grew and schools were closed in Da Nang and Hue, with the approval of local officials who owed their appointments to General Thi. A general strike in Da Nang on 13 March was 90 percent effective. In Saigon, leaders of the Buddhist Institute declared the country to be in a "state of crisis" and demanded the return of several generals who had taken part in the overthrow of Diem.⁶

On 15 March, the GVN, in its most questionable decision of the March-June political crisis, permitted General Thi to return to Da Nang to pack his belongings, say goodbye to friends, and demonstrate publicly his acceptance of dismissal prior to departing for a trip to the United States. Large and enthusiastic crowds greeted Thi on his arrival. By the end of the week he was occupying his old official residence with his general's flag flying.⁷

The GVN decided to stand fast in face of the growing opposition. The NLC had supported Ky's relief of Thi, and on 19 March Ky announced that the disturbances would have

5. (~~TS NOTFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 601.

6. (~~TS~~-GP 4) Msgs, Saigon 3315 and 3323 to State, 12 and 13 Mar 66, JCS IN 56664 and 58461. (~~TS NOTFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 601-602.

7. (~~TS~~-GP 4) Msgs, Saigon 3362 and 3370 to State, 16 and 17 Mar 66, JCS IN 63287 and 65203. (~~TS NOTFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 603.

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no influence on the government, adding that "the armed forces and the Administration will not yield to unjustified claims which are contrary to the interests of the nation and the people." He also reaffirmed the government's plan for a constitutional referendum in the fall of 1966 and general elections in 1967. The Buddhists reacted with a call for the replacement of the present government with an elected civilian government, and for the first time, demonstrators began to attack Ky by name.⁸

In the last days of March the demonstrations in Da Nang and Hue continued to grow, and they became increasingly acrimonious in tone. The so-called "struggle forces" now included Buddhists, students, civil servants, and some ARVN personnel. The demonstrations took on an increasing anti-American character. This was heightened on 25 March when a US Marine tore down an anti-American banner in Hue. The Marine apologized and the incident was smoothed over, but Ambassador Lodge cabled Washington that "we cannot allow the struggle committee to make unreasonable and humiliating demands on our troops."⁹

By the beginning of April, the struggle forces controlled many of the centers of political power in Da Nang and Hue. Hard-core elements were established not only in I CTZ towns and villages but also in areas of the II CTZ. On 30 March National Police in Hue staged an anti-GVN and anti-American demonstration, and radio stations in both Da Nang and Hue began to broadcast daily attacks against the government and the United States. Thi remained in I CTZ, ignoring all GVN requests to return to Saigon. His presence divided loyalties of the ARVN; much of the 1st ARVN Division supported the "struggle movement."¹⁰

8. (TS-GP 1) Monograph, MACV, "The March-June 1966 Political Crisis in South Vietnam and its Effect on Military Operations," 9 Dec 66, pp. 9-10 (hereafter cited as Monograph, "Political Crisis").

9. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 603. (C-GP-3) Msg, Saigon 3523 to State, 26 Mar 66.

(S) Msg, Saigon 3817 to State, 8 Apr 66, JCS IN 14850.

10. (TS-GP 1) Monograph, "Political Crisis" pp. 12-13.

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These problems and the turmoil they occasioned had telling effect on the conduct of the war. RVNAF activity in I CTZ dropped off sharply, owing largely to the activities of the 1st ARVN Division commander who led the division in a passive mutiny against the GVN. The number of heavy ARVN contacts and coordinated US/GVN operations decreased. RVNAF casualties for the last week in March dropped to the lowest weekly figure since the Khanh coup in February 1965. Labor strikes and general unrest hampered the discharge of ships, construction activities, and the movement of supplies, reducing the offensive capabilities of US and GVN forces.¹¹

In an attempt to mollify the struggle forces, Chairman Thieu announced on 3 April that a national political congress would be convened shortly to draft a constitution. The effect of this concession was quickly negated, however, when Ky publicly declared Da Nang to be "in the hands of the communists." He added that the government would organize an operation to retake the city, and warned that the mayor would be shot without a trial. During the night of 4-5 April, Ky, Defense Minister Co, and the Chief of the JGS, General Vien, with three VNMC battalions, flew to the Da Nang air base.¹²

Fearing a military clash between GVN and struggle forces, Washington instructed Saigon to withdraw all US advisors from the VNMC battalions, and to avoid any endorsement of the GVN claim of communist domination of the struggle forces. US forces were not to become involved in any conflict, and were to use "only minimum measures necessary" if directly attacked.¹³

Washington's fears of an armed clash proved unfounded. After spending 5 April in consultation with local officials at the air base, Ky announced over local radio that he had found some communist infiltration, but that Da Nang was not completely occupied by communists. He then

11. Ibid., pp. 13-14. (e) Msg, COMUSMACV to CINCPAC, 050910Z Apr 66.

12. ~~(TS NOFORN GP 1)~~ COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 606-607.

13. Ibid., pp. 605-606. (S-GP 3) Jt State-Def Msg (State 2965) to Saigon, 5 Apr 66, JCS IN 99045.

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flew back to Saigon without reaching any settlement, and the struggle in the I CTZ continued.¹⁴

On the following day, 6 April, the CG, 1st ARVN Division, formally committed his division to the struggle forces, claiming the GVN had betrayed the "people's" interest. At this stage, the United States withdrew all its advisors and aircraft support from the division and began the evacuation of US civilians from Hue and Da Nang.¹⁵

The withdrawal of the US advisors had an immediate impact. Shocked by this action, the CG, 1st ARVN Division, toned down his anti-American attitude and urged the return of the US advisors, promising to protect US installations. He stated that, although his division had no confidence in the Ky government, it would always stand side by side with allied soldiers, particularly US soldiers, in fighting communist aggression.¹⁶

There was a further improvement in the Da Nang crisis when the NLC replaced General Nguyen Van Chuan, who had succeeded General Thi as I Corps Commander, with a Hue-born General, Ton That Dinh. General Dinh avoided any show of force in Da Nang, and urged all soldiers to return to their units and civilians to turn in their guns. At the direction of General Dinh and JGS Chief Vien the three VNMC battalions, sent to Da Nang on 4 April, were returned to Saigon on 12 April.¹⁷

Meanwhile the GVN had convened the National Political Congress in Saigon. The Congress adopted a ten-point proposal, including provisions for both the election of a constituent assembly within four months to draft a constitution and the retention of the military government

14. (~~TS-NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 605.

15. Ibid., p. 606. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 1801 to State, 5 Apr 66, JCS IN 98958. (S-GP 3) Jt State-Def Msg (State 3035) to Saigon, 8 Apr 66, JCS IN 16065.

16. (~~TS-NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 607.

17. Ibid., pp. 607-608. (~~TS~~-GP 1) Monograph, "Political Crisis," p. 24.

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to organize the elections. At the conclusion of the conference, Thieu promulgated a decree for the election, to be held within three to five months. The Buddhist Institute accepted both the program and the decree, agreeing that the Ky-Thieu government should remain until the election was held. With the Buddhist acceptance of the GVN decree, the demonstrations in Da Nang and Hue ended, and a brief interlude of quiet settled over the I CTZ.¹⁸

The delicate calm in Da Nang and Hue was shattered on 7 May when Ky announced that the constituent assembly to be elected later in 1966 would merely draft a constitution, and that it would not be transformed directly into a national assembly. For this reason, Ky said, the present government would remain in power until a legislative assembly was elected "some time in 1967." This statement provoked strong reactions from Buddhist leaders and the struggle forces who had expected the Thieu-Ky government to resign with the election of the constituent assembly. Tri Quang, the Buddhist leader who acted as the main spokesman for the struggle forces, issued a series of increasingly inflammatory statements, and the demonstrations renewed.¹⁹

This time the GVN decided on swift action. On 15 May RVNAF paratroops and marines were airlifted to Da Nang and quickly secured the air base, the Da Nang garrison, the city hall, the National Police garrison, and the radio station. I Corps Commander, General Dinh, opposed the GVN operations, and he was subsequently replaced by General Huynh Van Cao.²⁰

Buddhist reaction to the move against Da Nang was also swift. On the same day the RVNAF moved into Da Nang Tri Quang cabled President Johnson, Ambassador Lodge, and the World Buddhist Association protesting the GVN use of force. He charged that the GVN was preparing to attack the Buddhist pagodas.²¹

18. (TS-GP 1) Monograph, "Political Crisis," pp. 24-25.

19. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 609.

20. (TS-GP 1) Monograph, "Political Crisis," pp. 32-34.

21. (C-GP 4) Msg, Saigon 4610 to State, 15 May 66, JCS IN 77196.

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The GVN move at Da Nang caught the United States unaware. The US Mission had no advance notice, and both Ambassador Lodge and General Westmoreland were out of the country. Because of Washington's concern over the situation, the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, directed the immediate return of COMUSMACV from Hawaii. On his arrival in RVN, General Westmoreland reported that the situation was "a complex one," and he feared that "there will be unfortunate bloodshed and political repercussions before the matter is quieted, from which nobody but the Communists will benefit." The State Department instructed Saigon to avoid supporting any GVN effort that appeared badly planned, ill-advised, and likely to drive militant Buddhists and many others into opposition which the GVN might not be strong enough to handle without compromise or extended bloodshed. Deputy Ambassador Porter replied that no such action had been taken, but he cautioned that the opposite course--moving quickly and giving the impression of pulling the rug out from under Ky--would cause the government to fall and be succeeded by the "worst sort of jury-rigged affair imaginable," one incapable of waging war or even making an acceptable peace.²²

While Washington was considering appropriate US action, the situation in Da Nang grew more serious. On 19 May, struggle forces fired on Vietnamese marines and GVN forces moved on a number of struggle positions. Heavy street fighting followed. On 21 May GVN forces occupied the Tan Linh Pagoda and an ARVN hospital, but the main struggle stronghold, Tinh Hoi Pagoda, continued to hold out.²³

Washington officials were growing increasingly alarmed over the widening struggle in Da Nang. Secretary Rusk instructed Ambassador Lodge to impress on the GVN leadership and dissident leaders the necessity for some compromise modus vivendi to stop the fighting and demonstrations and to allow all efforts to be turned to fighting the VC, preparing for elections, and bringing inflation under

22. (S) Minutes of [Saigon] Mission Council Meeting, 16 May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66. (S) Msg, JCS 2751-66 to COMUSMACV, 18 May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66. (S) Msg, State 3450 to Saigon, 15 May 66. (S) GP 2) Msg, SAIGON 4636 to State, 16 May 66, JCS IN 78061.

23. (TS-GP 1) Monograph, "Political Crisis," pp. 41-44.

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control. The Chairman sought General Westmoreland's opinion of a proposal to terminate all US economic and military assistance, suspend military and civilian advisory efforts, withdraw US units to base areas, and direct high US officials to urge leading GVN officials and opposition leaders to resolve their differences.²⁴

COMUSMACV did not share Washington's alarm. He believed the press coverage had exaggerated the crisis in Da Nang and that the situation had not deteriorated to the point where such drastic action as Washington proposed was required. He recommended against sending special emissaries. General Westmoreland informed General Wheeler that he was preparing a plan for US forces to take over ammunition and engineer depots at Da Nang under "the facade of a combined activity." In addition, MACV was assisting the ARVN to improve the GVN image in Da Nang through leaflets, broadcasts, civic action, and prompt indemnification. CINCPAC supported COMUSMACV's view, stating that Ky was doing the best he could to restore order, and the United States should not "badger" him with demands to negotiate with struggle leaders.²⁵

In accordance with COMUSMACV's plan, elements of the 4th Marine Regiment assumed control of the Da Nang East ammunition dump without incident on 23 May. Later in the day, the Tinh Hoi Pagoda surrendered to GVN forces and by evening the last pockets of resistance had collapsed. The Mayor and other key leaders of the struggle forces were arrested. The pacification of Da Nang had cost 150 Vietnamese killed and 700 wounded; 23 US personnel had been wounded.²⁶

The surrender of the struggle forces in Da Nang did not end the government's confrontation with the Buddhists.

24. (S) Msg, State 3575 to Saigon, 21 May 66, JCS IN 89923. (S) Msg, JCS 2840-66 to COMUSMACV, 21 May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66.

25. (S) Msgs, COMUSMACV 4070 and 4081 to CJCS, 22 May 66; (S) Msg, CINCPAC to CJCS, 23 May 66; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66.

26. (S) Msgs, Saigon 4876 and 4881 to State, 23 May 66, JCS IN 89883 and 89939. (S) Msg, Saigon 4896 to State, 23 May 66, JCS IN 90678. (TS-GP 1) Monograph, "Political Crisis," pp. 48-49.

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In Hue, Tri Quang accused the government of destroying the pagodas in Da Nang, and new demonstrations erupted in the ancient capital.²⁷

A further complicating factor was the continued presence of General Thi in Hue. In a broadcast on 23 May, he had urged his former troops to turn their weapons against the GVN. On 24 May he dispatched a message to COMUSMACV threatening to bring 1st ARVN Division troops to Hue to defend the city. Later on 24 May, COMUSMACV met with Thi. They both recognized that the continuing political unrest was profiting the VC, but Thi was adamant that the Thieu/Ky government must be replaced prior to the election. Thi did, however, agree reluctantly to meet with Ky. This meeting took place on 27 May at a US headquarters in Chu Lai. The meeting was cordial and Thi agreed to cooperate with Ky.²⁸

While the generals were negotiating, the situation in Hue had grown more violent. The demonstrations increased in size each day, and on 26 May, students sacked and burned the USIS Library. On 29 May a Buddhist nun burned herself to death, beginning a series of self-immolations to protest GVN and US actions. Buddhist monks also began demonstrations in Saigon.²⁹

In an effort to resolve the conflict with the Buddhists peaceably, Generals Thieu and Ky met with Tam Chau and other Buddhist Institute leaders in Saigon on 31 May and offered, in return for their support, to expand the NLC to include ten civilians. Tam Chau was receptive, but asked for time to think the proposition over. On the following day the Saigon Buddhist accepted the government's

27. (~~TS NOFORN~~ GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 614-615.

28. (S) Msg, MACV 4196 to CJCS, 25 May 66; (S) Msg, Saigon 4966 to State, 26 May 66, JCS IN 95268; (S) Msg, MACV 4300 to CINCPAC, 27 May 66; (S) Msg, MACV 4342 to CJCS, 28 May 66; OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66.

29. (S) Msgs, Saigon 4998 and 5001 to State, 26 May 66, JCS IN 95602 and 95691. (S) Msg Saigon 5003 to State, 26 May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66. (S) Msg, Saigon 2643 to State, 27 May 66, JCS IN 96893. (~~TS NOFORN~~ GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 615-616.

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offer, and in a joint communique of 2 June, the NLC publicly pledged to add the ten civilians to its membership by 6 June. For their part, the Buddhists promised to suspend all struggle activities.³⁰

The Buddhists in Hue, however, refused to accept the agreement reached in Saigon. Tri Quang continued to demand the removal of Thieu and Ky, and the demonstrations and self-immolations continued. The GVN added ten civilians to the NLC on 6 June. The new members were primarily political or professional figures, but, of those who were Buddhists, none were officials of the Institute. This brought the immediate opposition of the Institute. Tam Chau announced that the GVN was trying to destroy the Buddhist faith, and that the struggle would continue.³¹

Tri Quang launched a hunger strike to protest US support for the GVN, and the Buddhists introduced a new nonviolent technique of placing family and pagoda altars in the streets to block traffic. The new stratagem was employed initially in Hue, Da Nang, Quang Tri city, and Qui Nhon, but only in Hue did it reach serious proportions.³²

The GVN now decided to apply military pressure to end Buddhist agitation. On 10 June 350 riot police were flown to Hue. The GVN reinforced these forces on 13 June with another 300 riot police and on 15 June with an ARVN air-borne battalion. On 16 June the GVN declared martial law in Hue.³³

At this point, the split between Tam Chau and Tri Quang, which had been growing wider since the beginning of June, became public. Tam Chau charged Tri Quang with usurping his executive powers and causing irreparable friction in Buddhist ranks; he demanded that Tri Quang concern himself only with clerical matters. In reply, Tri Quang called for a general strike, for continuing

30. (S) Msg, MACV 4474 to CJCS, 1 Jun 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 616-617.

31. (TS-GP 1) Monograph, "Political Crisis," pp. 60-62.

32. Ibid., pp. 62-63. (C) Msg, Saigon 5322 to State, 6 Jun 66, JCS IN 23633.

33. (TS-GP 1) Monograph, "Political Crisis," pp. 64-65.

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nonviolent demonstrations, and for all Buddhist soldiers to lay down their arms.³⁴

In Saigon, where spasmodic Buddhist demonstrations had continued since 27 May, there was a particularly violent Buddhist demonstration on 18 June. During the day demonstrators clubbed a policeman to death, and a 16 year-old girl burned herself to death at the Institute. ARVN troops responded by sealing off the Institute. On 23 June GVN troops and police, without resorting to violence, moved into the Institute compound, rounded up 350 persons, including the confessed murderer of the policeman, and seized a quantity of weapons. The neutralization of the Institute ended Buddhist agitation, and marked the reestablishment of GVN control.³⁵

The three and a half months of Buddhist agitation and political crises had severely hindered military operations against the VC/NVA, especially in the I CTZ. US/Free World forces had been tied down by the necessity to provide additional troops and aircraft on alert, and to provide security for installations, roads, and bridges. RVNAF operations were even more seriously hampered by the crisis. The number of large operations by the 1st ARVN Division against the VC/NVA decreased markedly. Such operations as were conducted were usually in areas where the forces could be readily deployed to Da Nang or Hue. The personnel strengths present for duty for the 1st ARVN Division were down 23 percent for officers and 14 percent for enlisted men. The operational effectiveness of both the VNMC and the VNAF was lowered considerably. Overall RVNAF ordnance capability in I CTZ suffered an estimated 20 percent loss, and engineering capability was greatly reduced.³⁶

With the pacification of Da Nang and Hue and the restoration of government control in the I CTZ, the GVN found itself in a much stronger position, and it moved at once to take advantage of it. The GVN inaugurated on 5 July 1966 the 80-man People-Army Council, a predominantly civilian body to advise the government on political, economic, and social matters. On 13 July Prime Minister

34. Ibid., p. 65.

35. Ibid., pp. 66-67.

36. Ibid., pp. 57-59.

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Ky reshuffled his cabinet, adding four civilians and removing the two members who represented the only significant militant Buddhist influence. Meantime, in I CTZ, General Lam, who had replaced General Cao as Corps Commander on 31 May, was restoring the 1st ARVN Division to an effective fighting force.³⁷

The GVN also moved ahead with its plans for elections for the constituent assembly on 11 September. In early July, the Ministry of Information launched a four-phased program, designed to publicize the election, to explain the purpose and importance of the election, and to get the people out to vote. In conformity with Vietnamese laws and regulations, the elections were to be supervised by locally appointed committees, with participation by representatives of the candidates. The RVNAF was charged with providing security in order to assure maximum participation in the elections. The RVNAF concept of operations for this mission was to mount no major operations during the period and to provide security over as wide an area as possible. The cost to military operations for this brief lull period was not considered sufficient to outweigh the anticipated psychological gain from a big election turnout.³⁸

The US position on the GVN elections was a sensitive one. The United States was anxious for a good voter turnout, yet it wished to avoid any action which might be construed by world opinion as influencing or interfering with the elections. Consequently, US/FWMAF were ordered to maintain strong mobile reserves to react to any VC/NVA threat, to increase harassment and interdiction programs to keep the VC/NVA forces off balance, and to avoid operations in the vicinity of populated areas or polling places. The US Mission Council decided that US transportation would not be used to transport voters, election officials, or ballot boxes. The United States did, however, furnish logistic support in moving election materials into the field and in the production and dissemination of election materials. The Mission also ordered US forces to relieve the VNAF of routine missions to

37. ~~(TS NOFORN)~~ GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 621.

38. Ibid., pp. 621-622.

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enable it to meet requests from local officials to move candidates and others from place to place during the campaign.³⁹

As a possible means of increasing voter participation, the United States contemplated an election ceasefire. The State Department had suggested this approach on several occasions, but both Ambassador Lodge and the Joint Chiefs of Staff had opposed it. Ambassador Lodge believed that such a ceasefire would diminish rather than increase the vote. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, addressing the Secretary of Defense on 31 August, said that a voluntary reduction in military pressure against the enemy at election time would invite expanded guerrilla terrorism and enemy attacks, and would release enemy forces for interference with the election. They recalled that past stand-downs had been counterproductive and recommended "strongly" against the imposition of any additional limitations on US/FWMAF during the election. The suggestion of an election ceasefire subsequently was abandoned.⁴⁰

As the elections approached, COMUSMACV and the other members of the Mission Council exercised extreme care to avoid any sudden stress on the GVN political structure. When COMUSMACV received word that the NLC was considering ousting two of its members, the Mission Council informed the GVN that it was important that they do nothing at this time "to rock the boat," and the GVN did not carry out the planned expulsion.⁴¹

Undeterred by scattered acts of VC terrorism, some 4.3 million South Vietnamese, or 81 percent of the registered voters, went to the polls on 11 September to elect the 117 members of the Constituent Assembly. This did not represent an overwhelming endorsement for the GVN, since only two-thirds (5 million) of the adult RVN population was registered, but it was a remarkable event in a nation torn by guerrilla war,

39. Ibid., pp. 622-623.

40. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 3230 to Saigon, 27 Apr 66, JCS IN 15692; (S) Msg, State 3883 to Saigon, 14 Jun 66, JCS IN 37681; (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 5662 to State, 21 Jun 66, JCS IN 50227; (S-GP 1) JCSM-550-66 to SecDef, 31 Aug 66 (derived from JCS 2343/892-1); JMF 9155.3 (24 Aug 66).

41. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 623.

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and refuted Hanoi's claim that only the NLF could speak for the South Vietnamese.⁴²

US officials in both Saigon and Washington were pleased with the election outcome. The White House expressed its surprise and pleasure with the size of the vote, but cautioned that this election was only one step along the road to constitutional government. Hanoi dismissed the election as a "fraud" meant to perpetuate Ky in power, and to entrench the US military presence in South Vietnam.⁴³

Both the State Department and Ambassador Lodge had been hopeful that the new Constituent Assembly would encourage the formation of political parties and bring greater political stability and responsibility to South Vietnam's political life, but the composition of the Assembly did not seem to promise that these hopes would be realized. The State Department hoped that the constitution drafting process would lead to evolution of coalitions, and instructed Ambassador Lodge to encourage the Vietnamese to subordinate individual and group differences to the national interests. He was also to point out to the Deputies that the Assembly would be a crucial test of RVN political maturity, both in terms of establishing a viable political system and in terms of competing with the highly-organized and -disciplined VC political efforts.⁴⁴

With the large turnout for the election of the Constituent Assembly, the GVN felt more secure, and in late October Chairman Thieu and Prime Minister Ky went to Manila to meet with President Johnson and the leaders of the other Free World nations (Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, the ROK and Thailand) that had sent troops to RVN. The Manila meeting of 24-25 October reviewed the progress of the war as well as South Vietnam's political, social, and economic progress. The conference produced a joint communique pledging continued determination to secure freedom

42. NY Times, 12 Sep 66, 1.

43. ~~(S)~~ /Saigon/ Mission Council Action Memo No. 120, 15 Sep 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Sep 66. NY Times, 13 Sep 66, pp. 1, 4.

44. ~~(S)~~ GP 3) Msg, State 58064 to Saigon, 1 Oct 66, JCS IN 42799. ~~(TS NOFORN)~~ GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 96, 625.

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for South Vietnam and committing the GVN to a Revolutionary Development program.⁴⁵

On 18 November, Prime Minister Ky, rearranging his Cabinet to allay some regional dissatisfaction, split the powerful Ministry of Economy into two separate posts, the Ministries of Commerce and Industry, and replaced the Secretaries of State for Youth and for Education and Social Welfare. He also created a new Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Ky's most potentially dangerous action in the reshuffle was the relief of General Dam Van Quang, IV Corps Commander, and his appointment as Minister of Planning and Development, a new post dealing mainly with postwar planning and development. Quang accepted the change without rancor, and the Cabinet reshuffle passed without incident.⁴⁶

At the close of 1966, US officials were optimistic about the political situation in Saigon. After nearly three years of political unrest, characterized by coups, counter coups, and revolving-door governments, all indicators seemed to point to a return of political stability to South Vietnam. The Thieu-Ky government had held office for over 18 months, and had survived a severe challenge in the Buddhist agitation in the I CTZ during the early months of 1966. Ky had shown considerable insight and political acuity in the formation of his Cabinet, bringing into it a few civilians, as well as military officers, with differing religious backgrounds, and from both North and South. A widening personal quarrel between the two principal RVN Buddhist leaders, Thich Tam Chau and Thich Tri Quang, had split the powerful Buddhist opposition. Despite the Viet Cong threats of retaliation, 81 percent of the registered voters had demonstrated their support for the government by voting in October for a constituent assembly to draft a constitution. Thieu and Ky had publicly committed themselves to submit the constitution to the

45. Dept of State Bulletin, LV (14 Nov 66) pp. 730-735.

46. (S) Msg, Saigon 7752 to State, 5 Oct 66, JCS IN 49105.
(C) Msg, Saigon 7945 to State, 7 Oct 66, JCS IN 53008.
(S) Msg, Saigon 8681 to State, 17 Oct 66, JCS IN 70334.
(S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon to State, 19 Oct 66, JCS IN 76321.
(C) Msg, Saigon 10363 to State, 8 Nov 66, JCS IN 23034.
(S) Msg, Saigon 10597 to State, 11 Nov 66, JCS IN 28637.
(C) Msg, Saigon 11249 to State, 18 Nov 66, JCS IN 40494.

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people in 1967 and, subsequently, to hold national elections. All that the United States could do was to continue its encouragement of the GVN, watch, and hope.

Economic Problems

In addition to the dangerous political turmoil that plagued the GVN in the first half of the year, South Vietnam continued to face soaring inflation in 1966. With the greatly accelerated US troop buildup, and the construction of the necessary supporting facilities, inflation in South Vietnam had become acute in 1965. It grew even worse in 1966, with prices rising at a rate of 70 percent annually. The increase of US forces from 184,000 to 389,000 during the year, together with the \$60 million per month peak in military construction, brought a large and rapid inflow of US dollars further stimulating the already dangerous inflationary spiral. A vigorous GVN anti-inflation program and efforts by the United States to curb military spending in Vietnam were required. Such programs were begun in 1965 and continued in 1966, but were hindered by political unrest in early 1966.

In late December 1965, officials in Washington were considering a number of measures to lower US troop spending in Vietnam. These measures were designed to reduce troop incentives to make purchases on the local economy and to divert military pay into US channels, thus reducing the requirement for piaster expenditures. In early January, US AID Administrator David Bell visited Saigon and discussed the measures with COMUSMACV. Certain of the measures had already been implemented or planned for by MACV, including an information program to bring the inflationary problem to the attention of military personnel, a planned increase of out-of-country R&R from 2,500 to 13,500 per month during 1966, the addition of 100 US service clubs, motion picture facilities, and PXs, and the prohibition of competitive purchase of construction materials from the local market, except in emergencies. General Westmoreland and Mr. Bell agreed on the need for programs to stimulate voluntary troop savings, simplify procedures for the transfer of troop pay to the United States, and establish US banking facilities in Saigon (but not in outlying areas). Neither COMUSMACV nor CINCPAC was favorably disposed to certain other of the measures, including the assignment of an economic advisor to the MACV staff, the amendment of

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regulations to limit the amount of monthly pay an individual might draw in RVN, restricting the access to the local marketplace beyond current restrictions (no more than ten percent on leave or pass at any one time), the frequent and unannounced conversion of MPCs to new series, or limiting the amount of piasters US military personnel might purchase. General Westmoreland recognized the undesirable effects of large troops concentrations in or near population centers, and already had this problem under study.⁴⁷

During his stay in Saigon, Mr. Bell also met with GVN officials to stress the need for further GVN anti-inflationary measures. At Bell's urging, the GVN agreed to double import financing to a level of \$200 million in 1966, with \$50 million expended in the first quarter. In return, the United States pledged to expend \$120 million in the first quarter, with a target for the year of \$400 million. The GVN rejected US suggestions for action to meet the demand for capital transfers abroad, for dollar-dominated bonds sold for piasters, liberalization of the piaster exchange rate, and austerity taxes. The GVN did agree to use all foreign exchange earnings and not build up reserves during 1966, to aim at a 1966 tax collection of P 22 billion, and to review with the United States measures to keep the black market rate in check.⁴⁸

Another factor contributing to the RVN inflation was port congestion. The movement of the necessary supplies and equipment to support the large-scale military operations being conducted in Vietnam through the limited RVN port facilities resulted in an extensive buildup of cargo awaiting discharge in RVN. This, in turn, restricted the commodity supply in RVN and pushed prices up. General Westmoreland and Mr. Bell discussed this problem, and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, reported to the Secretary of Defense on 8 January that actions had been taken to eliminate the port congestion through use of private contractors to provide port clearance and coastal shuttle, provision of additional LSTs to improve the shipping situation, and maximum effort to palletize and utilize cargo

47. (S) CM-1204-66 to OASD(ISA), 19 Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66.

48. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 630.

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to provide more efficient handling at the destination port. Since 15 November 1965, shipments from the CONUS to RVN had been loaded for single-port discharge and MSTs shipping had been routed to "holding areas" outside RVN waters to await call by MACV into discharge areas. The Chairman anticipated that construction projects planned and in progress would bring significant improvement in physical port discharge by mid-1966. These were the first of a series of US actions to eliminate port congestion that culminated in the eventual MACV takeover of most of the non-commercial activities of the Saigon port.⁴⁹

The maintenance of economic stability was one of the matters considered when President Johnson and his chief advisors met with Chairman Thieu and Prime Minister Ky in Honolulu in early February. It was the consensus of the meeting that South Vietnam faced a serious problem of inflation during the current year, but that with appropriate stabilization measures, the situation could be managed. On the basis of the reports of their economic advisors, the President and Chairman Thieu and Prime Minister Ky approved a number of actions to combat inflation in Vietnam. The leaders of the two nations reaffirmed the agreements reached during Mr. Bell's visit to Saigon in January. In addition, the United States agreed to support a GVN request to the International Monetary Fund for technical assistance in the financial area, to provide US technical assistance, where appropriate, to support GVN anti-inflationary measures, and to moderate the demands of US expenditures on the RVN economy. The GVN committed itself to a number of actions to strengthen its economy, including simplification of import procedures, enlarging its customs forces, and increasing revenues through increased and better tax collection. In the area of monetary policy the GVN promised to consider raising the exchange rate for import duties, modifying the Special Currency Fund rate of 118 piasters per dollar, and increasing and using GVN's gold component of its international reserves. To improve the port congestion problem, the GVN agreed to appoint a master port director, directly responsible to the Prime Minister's

⁴⁹ (S) CM-1204-66 to OASD(ISA), 19 Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66. (S-GP 4) CM-1094-66 to SecDef, 8 Jan 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 66.

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office. The United States would supply technical assistance in port management.⁵⁰

The economic program adopted at Honolulu represented a sincere attempt to blunt inflation in RVN. Its expeditious implementation might have gone far toward slowing inflation. But hardly had the RVN leaders returned to Saigon when political agitation by the Buddhists began. The turmoil that gripped South Vietnam from early March through late June prevented any effective GVN action to carry out its Honolulu pledges. A status report on the Honolulu measures at the end of March showed little progress, and the AID Director told the President that the political problems had diverted almost all attention away from economics. He added that few officials could make policy decisions, and that only minor implementation of the Honolulu economic accords could be expected until the crisis was resolved.⁵¹

While the GVN was attempting to resolve the political confrontation with the Buddhists, the United States was moving ahead with implementation of its portion of the Honolulu agreements. In Saigon, General Westmoreland introduced additional actions to reduce US troop spending in Vietnam. On 13 April 1966, all R&R leaves to Saigon were suspended, and on 18 April COMUSMACV ordered positive actions to preclude the introduction of additional units or activities into the Saigon area. On 2 May he prohibited the acquisition of further Vietnamese-owned buildings for use as billets, without his personal approval. Strict black market controls were put into effect, and COMUSMACV took drastic action to reduce the high rate of pilferage from US stocks. Stringent controls were placed on US personal currency transactions and postal money orders, two US banking facilities were opened in Saigon, and PXs were

50. Joint Communique of Honolulu Conference, 8 Feb 66, reproduced in Dept of State Bulletin, LIV, (28 Feb 66), pp. 304-305. (S) "Draft Record of Conclusions and Decisions for Further Action of Honolulu Meeting," Att to Memo, DepAsstSecState for FE Affairs to Honolulu Participants, "Follow-up Paper on Honolulu Conference," 17 Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66.

51. (S) Vietnam: Honolulu Conference: Summary of Goals and Status of Activity, 30 Mar 66, Att to (S-GP 4) SACSA M-412-66 to CJCS, 27 Apr 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 66. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 631.

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expanded to absorb more troop spending. As had been planned, COMUSMACV expanded out-of-country R&R, and he initiated a command-sponsored savings bond drive.⁵²

US officials in Washington were also considering ways the United States could assist in slowing the inflation. Presidential Special Assistant Robert Komer returned from an April visit to RVN convinced that inflation was becoming the principal civil problem. He found that while much thought had been given to anti-inflation measures, not enough had actually been done. On 29 April, Mr. Komer stated in a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense that "the most effective, least painful, and ultimately least expensive way" to control inflation would be to operate on the supply side of the equation by "flooding" RVN with goods. One means of accomplishing this flooding was to relieve the bottleneck of port congestion. Komer proposed a series of interim measures by COMUSMACV for relief of the port problem, including release of civilian port facilities, stepped-up port construction, greater use of Vung Tau, military unloading of civil cargoes, and military trucking assistance in Saigon. He also suggested two longer-term steps: establishment of a joint shipping and port priority system; and US military operation of Saigon and other main ports.⁵³

A week later, on 6 May, Mr. Komer informed the Secretary of Defense that the growing inflationary pressure in Vietnam was a matter of "intense concern." He thought that inflation could soon reach such runaway proportions as to become a threat to US political objectives comparable to the Viet Cong or the severe political unrest. He recognized, said Mr. Komer, that the solution included actions that the GVN would have to take. He believed that the rapid military buildup was the chief contributor to inflation in Vietnam, and suggested additional actions the United States could take. In the management area, he listed: development of projections of the likely

52. (~~TS-NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 632-633.

53. (S-GP 4) Memo, SpecAsst to Pres /Komer/ 19 Apr 66, Att to Encl to JCS 2343/815, 21 Apr 66, JMF 9155.3 (19 Apr 66). (S-GP 4) Memo, SpecAsst to Pres /Komer/ to SecDef, 29 Apr 66, Encl to JCS 2343/821, 5 May 66, JMF 9155.3/9700 (29 Apr 66).

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inflationary impact of new troop deployments and military construction; adoption of an overall US military and civilian plaster and resource budget; establishment of a GVN manpower budget; development of a system of priorities to consider requirements in light of resources; and implementation of an effective procedure, both in Washington and in the field, to police military and civil programs from the standpoint of inflationary impact and political implications.⁵⁴

Mr. Komer also proposed the following specific anti-inflationary measures the military could take: more self-sufficient construction methods, postponement or stretch-out of less essential military construction, greater use of third country labor, greater reliance on RVNAF in military construction, reduction of less essential military shipments to relieve port congestion, and reduction of US demands for housing and other structures in urban areas. Mr. Komer was impressed with current efforts to recapture the earnings of US military and contractor personnel, but questioned whether further actions in this area could be accomplished, such as increased out-of-country R&R, further expansion of in-country R&R and PX facilities, cost-savings incentive awards to US, Vietnamese and third country personnel, and expansion of programs to alert US forces to the impact of their expenditures on the RVN economy and the necessity for measures taken.⁵⁵

The Komer request, coupled with the threat that inflation posed to the war effort, prompted the Secretary of Defense to direct an analysis of US military spending in Vietnam and the preparation of a plan to hold down the inflationary impact of the US buildup. Secretary McNamara designated Dr. Stephen Enke, Deputy Assistant Secretary (Systems Analysis), to head a task force, with representatives from the major DOD elements, including the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to consider various alternative methods of achieving this goal and to prepare a coordinated DOD plan.⁵⁶

54. (S-GP 1) Memo, SpecAsst Komer to SecDef, 6 May 66, Encl to JCS 2343/825, 10 May 66, same file.

55. Ibid.

56. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS et al., "DOD Plan to Hold Down In-Country Inflationary Impact of Military Spending in Vietnam," 17 May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66.

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With the quieting of the political disturbances in mid-June, the GVN again turned its attention to economic problems. The GVN devalued the piaster on 18 June 1966. This drastic move, taken in collaboration with the International Monetary Fund and with strong US support, adjusted the exchange rate from 60 to 118 piasters to the US dollar. There was no change in the special rate for personal transactions of US personnel in-country. At the same time, the GVN established a free market in gold to force down the black market price of the piaster.⁵⁷

While these measures were steps in the right direction and brought some improvement in the economic situation, they did not strike at a basic cause of the inflation that the GVN could control--the huge GVN budget deficit. The GVN had attempted to increase its revenues, and thereby reduce the deficit, by the introduction of new tax measures calculated to yield one billion piasters in additional revenue. The new measures included strict collection of motor vehicle taxes, conversion of the tax on restaurants from a percentage of proceeds to a flat assessment, and strict collection "on excessive rentals." The new tax measures fell short, however, of what had been accepted at the discussions in January and at Honolulu in February.⁵⁸

The most significant factor contributing to inflation in RVN was the massive US military buildup and the resulting inpouring of indigestible amounts of money for military construction. With the completion of the DOD analysis, directed by the Secretary of Defense in May, of the impact of further military spending on the RVN economy, Secretary McNamara on 13 July set quarterly piaster limits for US military piaster spending in RVN, in an attempt to hold US military expenditures and their impact on the economy to a manageable level. He explained to the Chairman that

57. (S) Minutes of [Saigon] Mission Council Meeting, 27 Jun 66, O CJCS File 091 Vietnam Jul 66. (S) Memo for Record, OSD(ISA) "Visit by Mr. Charles A. Mann, USAID Director, Saigon, with DOD Agencies, 2 Aug 66," 2 Aug 66, O CJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66. (TS NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 636. Newsweek, 27 Jun 66, p. 43.

58. (TS NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 631-632.

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the DOD goal was to hold total US piaster expenditures to the end-FY 1966 level without any reduction of military effectiveness. Secretary McNamara felt that this could be accomplished through careful management by field commanders. He fixed the first quarter FY 1967 piaster spending limit at P 9 billion, including spending by military contractors, plus 2.8 billion of PL 480-generated and counterpart piasters currently spent in support of the joint funded portion of the GVN military budget. The Secretary of Defense instructed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to plan a total four-quarter spending objective of not more than P 36 billion. He assigned the Joint Chiefs of Staff responsibility, with appropriate delegation to CINCPAC, COMUSMACV, and component commands as required, for enforcement of the quarterly limits, for a system of reporting of military spending in SVN, and for the establishment and maintenance of a monthly Activities Cost Index to measure the impact of rising wages and prices on the piaster cost of DOD activities in Vietnam. He directed the Military Departments, the Assistant Secretaries of Defense, the Director of Defense Research and Engineering and the Directors of the Defense Agencies to assist the Joint Chiefs of Staff in operating within the established limits.⁵⁹

The Joint Chiefs of Staff acted at once to implement the Secretary's directive. They assigned CINCPAC the enforcement responsibility and directed CINCPAC and COMUSMACV to submit appropriate reports of spending in RVN. The Assistant Secretary of Defense (SA) established Activities Cost Guidelines and COMUSMACV maintained the indices.⁶⁰

In early September, the Secretary of Defense set the second quarter FY 1967 piaster spending limit in Vietnam at P 11.8 billion, including Joint Support, then estimated at P 2.8 billion. The piaster spending objective for the year 1 October 1966 through 30 September 1967 was P 50 billion. At a conference in Washington on 20 September, a MACV representative stated that the P 2.8

59. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 13 Jul 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864, 15 Jul 66; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to SecA et al., 13 Jul 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864, 15 Jul 66; JMF 9155.3 (13 Jul 66):--

60. (U) J-3 SM-353-66 to Secy, JCS, 29 Sep 66, Encl to 1st N/H of JCS 2343/864, 4 Oct 67, same file.

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billion of Joint Support funding would not be sufficient to pay past years' obligations, meet the current year's obligation issued prior to the imposition of controls, and support the GVN military pay raise that followed the piaster devaluation. Consequently, COMUSMACV requested a Joint Support of P 4.7 billion for the second quarter FY 1967. CINCPAC confirmed this requirement and added P 25 million for past and current year obligations covering Assistance in Kind (AIK) funding for a total requirement of P 4.725 billion. General Wheeler requested the Secretary of Defense to raise the second quarter FY 1967 piaster limit by P 4.725 billion, but the Secretary of Defense approved only a P 3.6 billion addition.⁶¹

Ambassador Lodge, on 1 October 1966, recommended to Washington that US military piaster expenditures be held to 42 billion, plus 16 billion for civilian elements. COMUSMACV objected to these figures, but the AID Director and Ambassador Lodge felt that any higher figure would accelerate inflation and jeopardize political and military programs. In an effort to stay within the 42-billion limit, the Secretary of Defense on 11 November rejected the JCS force deployment program for CY 1966/1967 that called for an expenditure of P 46.21 billion in 1967. He approved instead Program #4, which he termed the maximum consistent with any reasonable hope for economic stability.⁶²

On 18 November, the Secretary of Defense set the piaster spending limit for the first quarter CY 1967 at P 10.3 billion and for the second quarter at P 10.7 billion. These limits included AIK spending but did not include Joint Support of the GVN military budget. The total DOD piaster spending figure for CY 1967 for use in negotiations with the GVN on economic stabilization

61. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 2 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864-6, 7 Sep 66; (S-GP 4) DJSM-1280-66 to CJCS, 1 Oct 66; CM-1808-66 to SecDef, 6 Oct 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864-8; (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 22 Oct 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864-10, 27 Oct 66; JMF 9155.3 (13 Jul 66).

62. (S) Msg, Saigon 7332 to State, 1 Oct 66, JCS IN 42777. (S-GP 4) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 11 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/855-27, 15 Nov 66, JMF 9155.3 (18 Jun 66) sec 9. (TS NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 638.

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was estimated at P 42 billion. Again COMUSMACV found these figures unacceptable, and the Chairman requested an increase of 10.5 billion for the first quarter and 11.0 billion for the second (for a total of P 21.5 billion); he also recommended a negotiating and planning figure for the year of P 44.0 billion. Secretary McNamara did revise the quarter figures as requested by the Chairman, but he refused to alter the P 42 billion negotiating figure.⁶³

While Washington officials had been busy fixing US spending limits in RVN and fitting deployment programs within these limits, COMUSMACV had continued efforts to hold down US spending and eliminate other factors contributing to inflation. In an attempt to relieve port congestion, he had negotiated and signed with the GVN on 4 July 1966 an agreement transferring from the GVN to MACV the responsibility for the discharge and clearance to final destination of all US AID/Central Purchasing Authority (CPA) cargo in the Saigon port. Despite this action and GVN action to improve the Saigon port, the congestion was even worse by December 1966, and the United States was considering taking over the operation of the entire port as the year ended.⁶⁴

On 13 September, COMUSMACV issued a comprehensive directive outlining policies, procedures, and responsibilities of the US military for limiting military expenditures. HQ MACV would establish maximum permissible quarterly piaster-expenditure authorization for all official MACV activities. Piaster expenditures from the Joint Support portion of the GVN defense budget would be controlled through a system of cash releases to the GVN, so that quarterly and annual limits would not be exceeded. COMUSMACV also established a Piaster Expenditures Control Working Group (PECWG) to access requirements and allot piaster limitations for MACV activities. The MACV directive

63. (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 18 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864-17, 20 Nov 66; (TS-GP 1) CM-1948-66 to SecDef, 23 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864-19, 29 Nov 66; (TS-GP 1) Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 28 Nov 66, Encl to JCS 2343/864-20, 30 Nov 66; JMF 9155.3 (13 Jul 66) sec 2.

64. (TS NOFORN GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 721-722. (S-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9507 to CINCPAC, 3 Dec 66. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 10143 to Saigon, 12 Dec 66, JCS IN 81859.

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did not restrict individual expenditures, but COMUSMACV continued his policy of encouraging savings programs and individual purchases of commodities from other than SVN markets.⁶⁵

Despite the determined efforts of both the United States and the GVN, inflation increased at a rampant rate during 1967. Prices rose by 70 percent and there were shortages of essential foodstuffs, supplies, and manpower. Only an end of the war could eliminate the sources of the inflation, and failing that, continued vigilance by the GVN and the United States to control inflation would be required to retain a semblance of economic order in South Vietnam.

Pacification

During 1966, the GVN survived four months of severe political turmoil, elected a constituent assembly, and adopted a number of economic measures to check the growing inflation. All these actions were encouraging signs for the future, but if the GVN was to become a stable, effective government, it was necessary for it to have the support of the South Vietnamese people. To gain this support, it was essential that the GVN provide adequate local security and protect the people from Viet Cong terrorism. It was to this end that the GVN had adopted successive pacification programs. These programs, dating back to 1959, had been characterized by ambitious plans that appeared promising on paper, but achieved little success in actual operation.

In December 1965, the GVN approved a new plan, the 1966 Rural Construction (RC) Plan, and issued appropriate implementing instructions. The key feature of this plan, which went into effect in January 1966, was the use of specially selected and trained rural construction cadre groups. The cadres, trained at the new National Training Center at Vung Tau, would be sent into the villages and hamlets for six to twelve months, rather than for just a few weeks as in previous pacification programs. The cadres would screen the inhabitants of the hamlets to

65. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 638.

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establish identities and to determine aspirations and needs. The cadres would follow up the initial census with interviews with all residents at intervals of 10 to 15 days. They would then attempt to solve the problems of the hamlets, organizing self-help programs. It was hoped that the local residents would then begin to identify and assist in rooting out the local underground, thereby breaking up the VC infrastructure.⁶⁶

The United States in 1966 continued its support of the GVN pacification/rural construction effort. During the period 8-11 January, senior representatives of the US Mission, Saigon, and the Washington Vietnam Coordinating Committee met in Warrenton, Virginia, to review, among other matters, the joint GVN-US pacification/rural construction program. The participants, encouraged by the 1966 GVN plan, recommended: continued direct US funding to support the most crucial aspects of the RC program; optimum organization of the US Mission for support of the RC program; collection both in Washington and Saigon of available material to meet primary needs and requirements of rural population; encouragement of representative bodies on the hamlet and village level, as well as the development of nongovernmental bodies, such as cooperatives and labor unions; and continued guidance to the GVN to assure proper relations of the respective roles and missions of the RC teams, police, and regional and popular forces with the mission of the regular forces.⁶⁷

President Johnson assured Chairman Thieu and Prime Minister Ky of continued US support for the RC program when he met with the GVN leaders in Honolulu in early February. With regard to specific actions, the United States and the GVN agreed that ARVN military commanders would give "adequate" priority to rural construction areas; that the GVN would move forward with the election of village executive councils, and that emphasis would be given, increasingly, to effective cadre training, with concentration on political indoctrination. The GVN leaders promised that greater attention would be placed on RVNAF troop indoctrination (with the United States to study additional support

66. (S-GP 1) Rpt, "Warrenton Meeting on Vietnam, January 8-11, 1966," 13 Jan 66, Encl to JCS 2343/754, 17 Jan 66, JMF 9155.3 (13 Jan 66).

67. Ibid.

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requirements) and that more effort would be directed toward the development of agriculture, handicraft and cottage industries, and expansion of rural electrification programs and credit facilities for farmers. But even with these improvements, the GVN RC Minister, General Nguyen Duc Thang, estimated at the meeting that only 75 percent of the 1966 RC goals could be achieved by the end of the year.⁶⁸

On 21 February 1966, the GVN redesignated the Ministry of Rural Construction the Ministry of Construction, in order to eliminate the implication that the RC program was concerned only about rural and not urban areas. Since the English translation of the new ministry title did not describe adequately the broad objectives of the program, Prime Minister Ky coined the English term "Revolutionary Development (RD)." The GVN defined Revolutionary Development as:

the integrated military civil process to restore, consolidate and expand government control so that nation building can progress throughout the Republic of Vietnam. It consists of those co-ordinated military and civil actions to liberate the people from Viet Cong control, restore public security; initiate political, economic and social development; extend effective Government of Vietnam authority; and win the willing support of the people towards these ends.⁶⁹

The dynamic General Thang, who had been Minister of Rural Construction since mid-1965, continued as Minister of Revolutionary Development.

68. Joint Communique of Honolulu Conference, 8 Feb 66, reproduced in Dept of State Bulletin, LIV (28 Feb 66), pp. 304-305. (S) "Draft Record of Conclusions and Decisions for Further Action of Honolulu Meeting," Att to Memo, DepAsstSecState for FE Affairs to Honolulu Participants, "Follow-up Paper on Honolulu Conference," 17 Feb 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66.

69. (S) ~~TOP SECRET~~ (GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, p. 506.

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In accordance with the 1966 RC/RD Plan, the GVN in February established a series of RD councils, extending from the national level down to the district, with the chairman at each level being a member of the council at the next higher level. The Minister of Revolutionary Development served as Chairman of the National RD Council. These councils met periodically to review projects and progress, to suggest program improvements, and to give emphasis and direction to the RD effort.⁷⁰

In order to improve coordination on RD matters on the US side, COMUSMACV named the Chief of his RD Division, on 24 February, as an advisor to Deputy Ambassador Porter for RD matters. The MACV advisor served as the focal point for all MACV RD problems requiring coordination with the Embassy; he presented MACV views to the Ambassador, insuring the appropriate interrelationship of MACV programs with those of other elements of the country team.⁷¹

In an attempt to integrate the direction, coordination, and supervision in Washington of all nonmilitary programs in Vietnam, including RD, President Johnson designated Robert W. Komer, on 28 March 1966, as his Special Assistant for Vietnam. Also, the President named Ambassador William Leonhart as Deputy Special Assistant for Vietnam, charging him with responsibility for coordinating the RD/Pacification program with the programs for combat force employment and military operations.⁷²

Mr. Komer's first action was to visit Vietnam to learn for himself the status of all nonmilitary programs. On his return to Washington, Mr. Komer reported to the President that, although "our splendid military effort is going well," civil programs lagged far behind. He made a number of recommendations, including a higher priority for certain key pacification programs, particularly the cadres and the national police. Also, he cited a need for faster progress in land reform and urged a higher priority for RD in the Delta (IV Corps) region. Mr. Komer recognized that while US military programs in RVN were largely self-contained,

70. Ibid., p. 510.

71. Ibid., p. 506.

72. (GP 4) NSAM 343 to SecDef et al., 28 Mar 66, Encl to JCS 2343/804, 31 Mar 66, JMF 9155.3 (28 Mar 66).

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civil programs, including RD, had to operate through a "feeble GVN." He stated that the United States must try to build up a stable, progressive GVN, rather than "(as some suggest in their frustrations)" taking over the civil as well as the military role in Vietnam. He also called for better coordination in civil and military planning to coordinate the military's sweep operations with civil pacification. The Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) assured Komer of "continuing support from DOD resources" in the pursuit of a more effective nonmilitary program in Vietnam.⁷³

Meanwhile, COMUSMACV reported in mid-April that RD programs were getting under way, "though slowly," adding that it was too early to predict the success of the programs. The primary military contribution to these programs was in establishing the requisite level of security to permit initiation of other RD tasks. US support for the RD effort took the form of advisory assistance; over 2,000 US military advisors assisted the GVN RD organization from the national down through the district levels. In addition, OAS, USAID, and JUSPAO personnel operated at the region and province levels. At the national level MACV had 34 full-time advisors assigned to work with the Ministry of RD. There were MACV sector advisory teams, consisting of approximately 20 personnel, in each of the 43 SVN provinces, and MACV had subsector advisory teams of about 6 personnel in 187 of the 243 districts in RVN. A typical subsector team consisted of the subsector advisor, a major or captain; an assistant advisor, a captain or lieutenant; an E7 operations/intelligence advisor; an E6 light weapons infantry advisor; an E6 medical advisor, and an E4/E5 radio operator. Certain of the subsector advisory teams consisted of US Special Forces detachments. At the district or subsector level, the MACV advisors were the only resident US personnel available to advise the district chiefs on all military or civil matters. COMUSMACV estimated that, in general, the subsector advisory teams

73. (GP 4) Memo, SpecAsst Komer to President, 19 Apr 66, Att to Encl to JCS 2343/815; (GP 3) Ltr, ASD(ISA) to SpecAsst Komer, n.d., Encl to JCS 2343/815-1, 2 May 66; JMF 9155.3 (19 Apr 66).

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contributed 50 percent of their time in support of non-military aspects of RD.⁷⁴

In addition, US naval advisors were attached to each RVN ship, River Assault Group, Junk Division, and naval base facility, and the United States furnished medical and engineering support for Revolutionary Development. Twenty-one teams of the US Military Provisional Hospital Assistance Program (MILPHAP) provided medical care to the RVN civilian population, advice in public health and sanitation, and training to Vietnamese health personnel. Seven US Seabee Technical Assistance Teams (STAT) performed construction work, such as well drilling, sewer construction, and general rural improvements, and four US Army Engineer Central Advisory Detachments (ECADS) supported the GVN rural surface water supply programs.⁷⁵

In early April, Deputy Ambassador Porter proposed to Mr. Komer a rapid expansion of the US-supported cadre training center to raise the annual training rate from 19,000 to 39,000 by the end of 1966. COMUSMACV, who had not been consulted prior to the submission of the proposal to Washington, found the objectives of the proposal laudable, but thought that such an expansion would strain existing resources and would produce more cadre personnel than RF/PF could support in the countryside. The cadres would then be compelled to devote themselves to security, thereby hindering the overall RD program. Instead, he suggested the creation of a study group with representatives from all the Saigon Mission agencies to examine the proposed expansion in light of its impact on current programs. The Joint Chiefs of Staff supported COMUSMACV's suggestion,

74. (S) Ltr, Chief, RD Div, MACV, to SACSA, 15 Apr 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Apr 66. (S-GP 4) SACSA Paper, "USMACV Sector and Subsector Advisory Teams," Att to Memo for Record, "Meeting with Mr. Robert Komer, SpecAsst to Pres, on Sector and Subsector Capabilities for the Execution of Non-Military Programs," 15 Jun 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66.

75. (S) Information Book for CJCS for Use during the Seven-Nation Conference, 24-26 Oct 66, OCJCS Files.

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and no further action was taken on expanding the cadre training program.⁷⁶

Despite the promising GVN RC/RD 1966 plan, continuing US support, and the GVN and US actions to strengthen RD organizations, the RD program, by June, had not progressed as well as had been hoped. The RD effort, like other civil efforts, had been hindered by political unrest. Ambassador Lodge informed the State Department at the end of May that, although 70 percent of the May goals had been achieved, the RD program remained behind schedule. Such progress as had been made was questionable, Mr. Lodge said, because some GVN officials tended to meet their goals by accepting substandard construction and performance, and inadequate security. He saw, as the major obstacles to the RD effort, the continued lack of local security and the marginally effective leadership at the lower levels of the RD organization. The first RD cadres had graduated from the Vung Tau center on 21 May 1966 and returned to their home provinces, but the Ambassador stated that it was too early to judge their effectiveness.⁷⁷

Mr. Komer was more sanguine about the RD effort. He returned from a trip to Vietnam in June both "an optimist and a realist"--optimistic because COMUSMACV's spoiling operations as well as the political and economic sides were all going well, and a realist because he recognized how much further there was to go. In a memorandum for the President on 1 July, Mr. Komer reported that the progress of military action against the VC was not matched by the pacification and "civil side" operations. He found the greatest weakness was the inability of the GVN to capitalize on the opportunities that the military operations had provided to extend control over large areas of the countryside. The erosion of GVN control had ceased, but "we" had not really extended "our" control outside the

76. (S) Memo, DepAmb Porter to SpecAsst Komer, 6 Apr 66; (S) Memo, SpecAsst Komer to SecDef et al., 21 Apr 66; Encls to (S-GP 3) JCS 2343/816, 22 Apr 66, JMF 9155.3 (6 Apr 66). (S-GP 3) JCSM-261-66 to SecDef, 25 Apr 66 (derived from JCS 2343/816-1), same file. (S) NOFORN GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 515-517.

77. (S) Airgram, Saigon A-709 to State, 28 Jun 66, OCJCS File Q91 Vietnam Jul 66.

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main towns during the last year. Mr. Komer believed that victory could not be assured until the United States and the GVN got rolling on pacification and gave the peasants both security and a hope for a better future. He viewed the GVN and the ARVN as the weak links in the chain; the 700,000-man ARVN was not pulling its weight. The United States was "bearing the brunt of the effort, which is neither necessary or desirable." Mr. Komer's two main conclusions were that the United States must 1) step up its support of Pacification/Revolutionary Development, and 2) galvanize the GVN and the ARVN into a much greater and better effort in this field.⁷⁸

A MACV briefing for the Mission Council on 8 August 1966 indicated much the same conclusions. The MACV briefing officer told the Mission Council that military operations alone could not win the war in Vietnam. In the final analysis, he said, the RD program offered "the only real hope" to bring the conflict to a successful conclusion. One of the reasons for the lack of success in the RD effort, the briefing officer stated, was the lack of adequate ARVN support. MACV explained that this lack of ARVN support resulted from the requirements on the ARVN to devote its main efforts toward elimination of VC main force units; inadequate plans, directives, and organization; apathy of the ARVN personnel; leadership and manpower deficiencies; and a lack of ARVN appreciation of the importance of the RD program. The resources and efforts of all US Mission agencies, as well as those of the GVN, must be organized and directed toward maximum support of RD.⁷⁹

During the summer both the GVN and the United States acted to bolster the lagging RD effort and to step up military support for RD. On 12 July the GVN elevated General Thang to the position of Commissioner-General for Revolutionary Development with responsibility for the Ministries of Agriculture, Public Works, and Administration (formerly Interior), in addition to his former task of Minister of RD. In late July, the Chief of the JGS, at COMUSMACV's urging, directed the ARVN to increase

78. (S-GP 4) Memo, SpecAsst Komer to Pres, 1 Jul 66, Encl to JCS 2343/862, 8 Jul 66, JMF 9155.3 (1 Jun 66).

79. (S) MACV J-3 Briefing for Mission Council, 8 Aug 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

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the support and tempo of RD operations. The Chief of the JGS emphasized to the ARVN commanders the importance of the RD program and instructed them to assign the same importance to pacification/RD operations as to search-and-destroy operations. In addition the GVN revised the RD mission and instructions for clarity and precision.⁸⁰

In support of the GVN actions, COMUSMACV instructed all US advisors to encourage ARVN commanders to comply with the JGS directives. General Westmoreland believed that at least 50 percent of the ARVN forces in I, II, and III CTZs should be employed in direct support of RD, and he directed US advisors to urge ARVN and RF/PF forces to operate at night to "take the night away from the VC," to execute small unit operations based on timely intelligence, and to carry out saturation patrolling of long duration. MACV advisors would assist the ARVN in establishing education and training programs at all levels and in orienting ARVN attitudes toward RD. In September COMUSMACV proposed to the Chief, JGS, that, as a means of enhancing the military support for RD, the JGS and MACV form a joint team to prepare appropriate directives to establish Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) to provide guidance to field commanders and organize a detailed two-week RD indoctrination program for all ARVN maneuver battalions. The Chief, JGS, accepted the proposal, and MACV and ARVN representatives proceeded with the preparation of the necessary guidance, instructions, and training programs. These programs did not get under way until January 1967.⁸¹

At the direction of Deputy Ambassador Porter, a US interagency study group in Saigon examined the roles and missions assigned to the various Revolutionary Development elements, and considered ways of improving the current RD concept and performance. The study group presented its voluminous report to Ambassador Porter on 24 August 1966. In essence, it called for US/Free World forces to continue their efforts to destroy VC main force and NVA units in order that the ARVN could "be-reoriented

80. ~~(TS NOFORN)~~ GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 522-523.

81. Ibid., pp. 523-527.

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toward the mission of providing the requisite active security for Revolutionary Development." COMUSMACV objected to certain findings of the study group. No action was taken on the report.⁸²

On 13 September 1966, Mr. Komer presented to the President a comprehensive report of the "other war" ("civil side activities") in Vietnam. Komer told the President that the RD program had been "relatively slow in gathering speed." Over the past several months there had been, in terms of numbers, a "modest gain" in the security of hamlets and population. Komer placed the number of secure hamlets as of 30 June 1966 at 4,054--an increase of 855 since 1 July 1965. He estimated that as of 31 August 1966, 55 percent of the population in RVN was in reasonably secure areas as opposed to 50 percent at the beginning of the year. This did not mean that the balance was under VC control; rather, much of the countryside was controlled by neither side or was in the process of being recovered. He estimated that 21 percent of the population was still under VC control with the remaining 24 percent caught in the middle. As in all previous assessments of pacification/RD progress, Mr. Komer emphasized that much more remained to be accomplished, but he emphasized that the ground work for an accelerated RD effort was being effectively laid and that better results were in prospect. He stated that, as ARVN and US/FWMA forces achieved continuing success in driving back NVN and VC main force units, an increasing proportion of regular RVNAF units could help provide the indispensable security base for RD.⁸³

In a draft memorandum for the President, dated 22 September, the Secretary of Defense expressed his conviction that the divided US responsibility for pacification between the military and civilian elements of the country team in Saigon was a major factor in the "negligible" progress being made in the pacification sphere. The

82. (S-GP 1) /Saigon/ Mission, "Report of Inter-Agency 'Roles and Missions' Study Group," 24 Aug 66, Att to Encl to JCS 2343/696, 6 Dec 66; (S-GP 1) Ltr, MACV to CINCPAC, 26 Sep 66, Att to Encl to JCS 2343/696, 6 Dec 66; JMF 9155.3 (24 Aug 66).

83. (U) Memo, SpecAsst Komer to Pres, 13 Sep 66. Encl to JCS 2343/909, 19 Sep 66, JMF 9155.3 (13 Sep 66).

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civilian effort included AID, then called the United States Operations Mission (USOM); the Joint US Public Affairs Office (JUSPAO), and the CAS. On the military side, the Revolutionary Development Division of the MACV staff coordinated the military support aspects of pacification/RD. Only at the ambassadorial level was there a single in-country manager. The Secretary of Defense proposed to eliminate this fragmented responsibility by placing all US activities and personnel that were part of the pacification program under COMUSMACV, with the responsibility delegated to a Deputy to COMUSMACV for Pacification. He requested JCS comments on this proposal, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff readily endorsed it.⁸⁴

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reaffirmed this view on 14 October. In a memorandum for the Secretary of Defense they stated that the pacification/RD program was not adequate to the situation; they continued to favor the transfer of the entire program to COMUSMACV. But, if for political reasons, the President thought a civilian organization mandatory, they would not object. They were not optimistic, however, that a civilian organization could be created, except at the expense of costly delays.⁸⁵

Responsibility for the pacification program was considered at a White House meeting of 15 October 1966. The Secretary of State strongly objected to the suggestion that this responsibility be transferred from civilian to military hands. The President, although dissatisfied with the progress of the program, was unwilling to override Secretary Rusk. President Johnson did specify, however, that he wanted action "soonest"--within a period of 90 days. The implication was that he would again consider a transfer of responsibility at the end of that time if the situation had not improved. In May 1967 COMUSMACV was assigned responsibility for the pacification program "under the overall authority of the Ambassador."⁸⁶

84. (S-GP 1) Draft memo (Draft/22), SecDef to Pres, 22 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/917, 24 Sep 66; (S-GP 1) Memo, ASD/ISA to CJCS, 22 Sep 66, Encl to JCS 2343/917, 24 Sep 66; (S-GP 3) JCSM-626-66 to SecDef, 29 Sep 66 (derived from JCS 2343/917-1); JMF 9155.3 (22 Sep 66).

85. (S-GP 3) JCSM-672-66 to SecDef, 14 Oct 66, JMF 9155.3 (14 Oct 66).

86. (S) Msg, JCS 6339-66 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 17 Oct 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Oct 66.

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Late in October President Johnson met in Manila with GVN leaders and the leaders of other Free World nations assisting RVN, to review the purposes and progress of the war. During the course of the two-day conference, Chairman Thieu and Prime Minister Ky reported on the RD effort, and reaffirmed the GVN intent to train and assign "a substantial share" of the RVNAF to clear-and-hold actions in order to provide a shield for RD programs. The GVN leaders pledged that RD measures, particularly the training of RD cadres, would be improved and expanded.⁸⁷

The Manila Conference, coupled with the President's dissatisfaction with the pacification program, sharpened the focus of US attention on RD support. On 21 November 1966, Ambassador Lodge created the Office of Civil Operations (OCO), under Deputy Ambassador Porter to integrate all of the Mission's fragmented civil support for pacification/RD into a consolidated effort. The OCO would be represented in the four regions by regional directors who would be responsible for all US civil RD support in their region. Under these directors, there would be OCO representatives in the provinces. COMUSMACV concurrently upgraded his Revolutionary Development Division to the Revolutionary Development Support Directorate (RDSD), a separate staff agency to deal with the increasing scope of RD operations, and to add stature to the office.⁸⁸

A continuing problem in the pacification/RD effort was the measurement of progress. Over the years, many systems had been tried and discarded in favor of what, each time, seemed a better method. Following the Honolulu Conference in February 1966, COMUSMACV developed a new system for evaluating the RD program, measuring progress in relation to the specific goals and programs fixed at Honolulu. The new approach involved examining major problems, breaking them out in terms of tasks, evaluating progress made in accomplishment of specific tasks, and

87. Joint Communique of Manila Conference, 25 Oct 66, reproduced in Dept of State Bulletin, LV (14 Nov 66), pp. 730-735.

88. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 532-535. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, pp. 564-568.

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finally, analyzing the separate results in the context of their contributions to the total effort.⁸⁹

On 13 December 1966, the US Mission Council in Saigon approved a new RD evaluation system. This system, entitled the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES), was designed to develop and maintain data that would effectively measure RD progress at the hamlet level. The evaluations would be made by the subsector advisors who would have a standard worksheet with 18 indicators and eight problem areas. Numerical values were assigned to each indicator and area and the results were computerized, permitting the storage of vast amounts of material and printouts of detailed analyses of comparisons, changes, and quantifications. The HES was put into operation on 1 January 1967.⁹⁰

When, early in the year, it became evident that all of the 1966 RD goals could not be met, the GVN and the United States began planning for 1967 a RD concept that they hoped would be more successful. A MACV planning group met with appropriate representatives of the JGS and RD Ministry to develop estimates and to plan a tentative concept for 1967; the RD Minister or his representative visited every province to gain a clearer understanding of the problems; and a JGS team, with MACV and AID representatives, visited each Corps to coordinate military plans with RD programs. These efforts culminated in a RD concept for 1967 that was annexed to the Combined Campaign Plan for 1967 approved on 7 November 1966. In general terms, the 1967 concept assigned the ARVN the primary mission of providing security for RD, while US and Free World forces would continue efforts to destroy VC/NVA main forces and base areas. In the three northern CTZs, the ARVN would devote at least half of its efforts to RD support, but in IV CTZ, ARVN RD support might have to be limited to 25 percent. Free World forces would support RD by the provision of security in their tactical areas of responsibility and base areas, and by contributing "implicit aid" to RD and "the resurgence of the RVN economy as a by-product of normal operations."⁹¹

89. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 540-544.

90. Ibid., pp. 545-546. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1967, pp. 622-623.

91. (~~TS NOFORN~~-GP 1) COMUSMACV Command History, 1966, pp. 548-549.

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COMUSMACV was determined that all US personnel, particularly the ARVN advisors, would understand this new RD concept. On 22 December 1966, he wrote all the Corps Senior Advisors, stressing the importance of success of the 1967 RD effort and reminding all ARVN advisors that it was essential for them to understand every aspect of RD support and to use this knowledge "in every way possible" to assist the ARVN. On 29 December 1966, COMUSMACV signed a combined MACV/JGS directive requiring the preparation of sector security plans to provide coordinated military support for provincial RD activities. General Westmoreland was hopeful that the new GVN RD concept, together with stronger military support, would enable the GVN to "surge ahead" with Revolutionary Development in the coming year.⁹²

COMUSMACV was also concerned over a view circulating in "US civilian circles" in Saigon that the ills of RD were the fault of the ARVN and MACV. This view held that the ARVN was improperly organized at the outset, with emphasis on the creation of a "conventional" rather than a counter guerrilla force. This basic error, compounded over the years by shortsighted advisors, had produced an ARVN powerless in terms of organization and attitude to cope with the security task necessary to destroy the communist infrastructure and guerrilla forces. In an attempt to nullify this view, COMUSMACV made a presentation to the Mission Council, stressing the following four points: the "ARVN's structure and capabilities have been molded by the necessity for its employment against major conventional enemy forces as well as guerrillas"; only with the US/Free World buildup had it been possible "to contemplate reemphasis on ARVN capabilities from operations against enemy regular formations to security tasks in support of RD"; the RVNAF provided the only feasible framework for mobilization of a major segment of RVN manpower, and "with the zenith of the mobilization having been reached," attention could be and was being shifted to improving the quality of the RVNAF; and the fundamental weakness within the RVNAF was and could continue to be the inadequacy of leadership at all levels.⁹³

92. Ibid., pp. 549-550.

93. (TS) Msg, COMUSMACV to CJCS and CINCPAC, 12 Dec 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 66.

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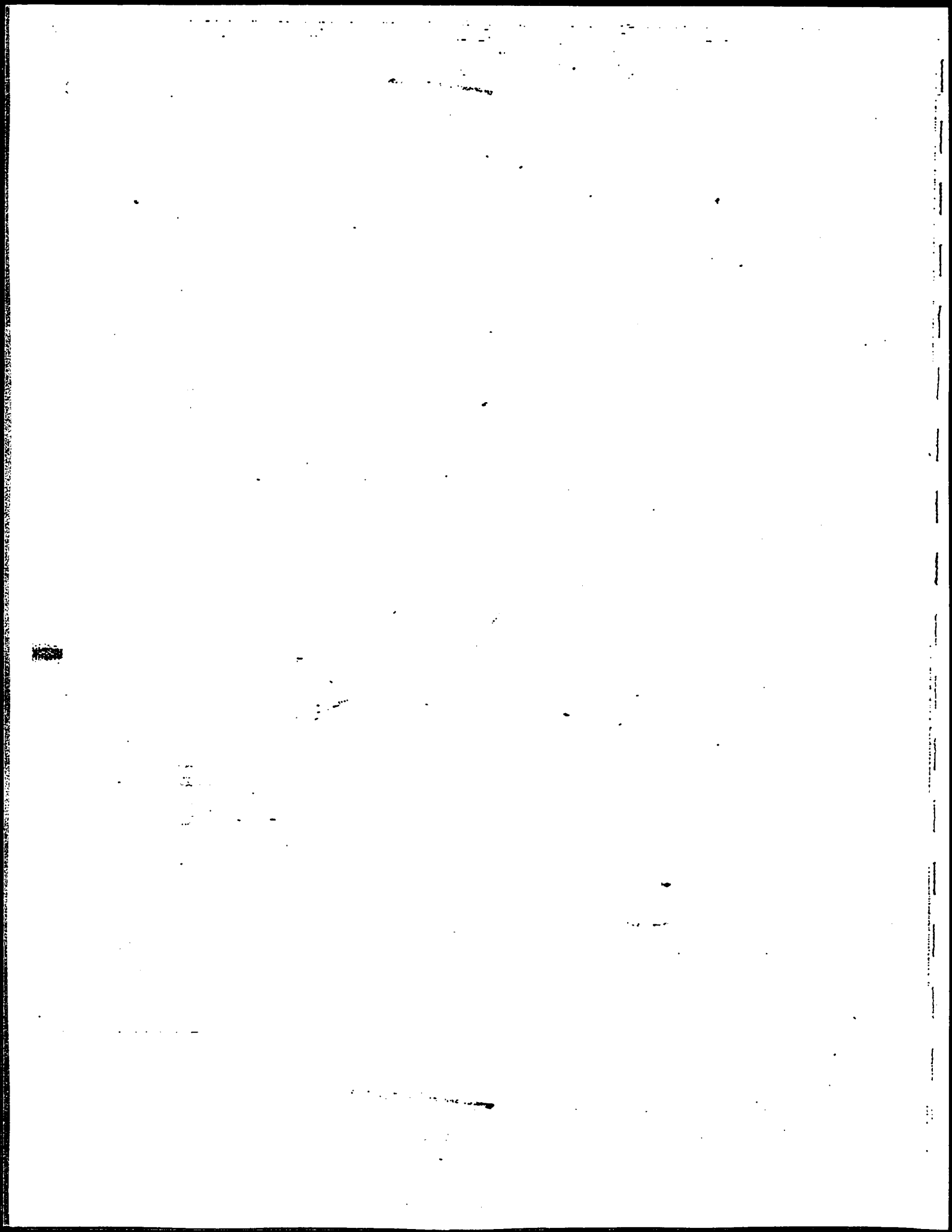
At the year's end there was also some difference of opinion on Revolutionary Development between the military and civilians in Washington. General Wheeler thought that there was too much concentration by "many Washington agencies" on pacification/RD as the answer to all problems in RVN. While he did not disagree with "the crucial influence which will ultimately stem from a successful RD/Pacification program," he feared that the tendency to seize on one facet of the complex situation in Vietnam as the "key" to eventual victory might cause an undue focus on that program to the detriment of other critical programs.⁹⁴

As 1966 ended, the pacification/Revolutionary Development situation in SVN remained much the same as it had been at the beginning of the year. Despite the improved military situation, an ambitious GVN RD program, continued US assistance and support for the program, and improvements in both the GVN and US RD machinery, the progress of Revolutionary Development during 1966 was not impressive. The efforts of the GVN and the United States had only been able to raise the percentage of the RVN population in secure areas by five percent during the year, from 52 to 57 percent. On the eve of 1967, as at the beginning of 1966, the GVN had a promising program in the wings, and both the GVN and US officials again prognosticated substantial improvement in RD in the coming year. But for the United States the problem was the same. US and Free World forces could keep the VC from winning; the United States could support, pressure, and cajole the GVN on RD matters, but only the GVN could "win the hearts and minds" of the South Vietnamese people. The Secretary of Defense summed up the situation when, after a visit to RVN in October 1966, he stated that the concepts of the GVN pacification plan were sound and the GVN leadership "vigorous and able," but the "progress is very slow indeed. This is one area that requires vigorous action during the next year."⁹⁵

94. (S) Msg, JCS 7859-66 to CINCPAC and COMUSMACV, 20 Dec 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 66.

95. (S ~~NOFORN~~-GP 1) DIA/JCS, Southeast Asia Military Fact Book, Jan 67, DIAISUP-3-67, p. A-2. (U) Maj Richard C. Kriegel, USMC, "Revolutionary Development, Last Chance for Victory in Vietnam," Encl to Ltr, CMC to CJCS, 13 Jan 67, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Jan 67. NY Times, 14 Oct 66, 13.

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Chapter 39

EFFORTS TOWARD NEGOTIATION - THE TRUCE PERIODS 1966

Although the peace offensive appeared to have failed and US bombing of targets in NVN was resumed on 31 January, President Johnson persisted in his efforts to arrive at a negotiated solution in the Vietnam War. Neither side changed its position substantially during 1966, although there were constant restatements of these positions by official spokesmen. The public exchanges became weapons in a propaganda battle being fought for world opinion. Underlying the propaganda aspect, however, was a serious effort by the United States to convey to the other side the sincerity of its intentions and to convince the enemy of the desirability of negotiation. At the same time the United States had to avoid implying any prior concessions that could, if talks developed, limit its negotiating flexibility. Therefore, US officials prepared their statements with great precision to make as clear as possible the exact position of the United States on such matters as a bombing halt or withdrawal of forces. At the same time, in a continuing effort to determine the enemy's intentions, US officials weighed every official communist statement with extreme care, searching for subtleties in meaning and possible changes in emphasis that might reflect a relaxation or shift in position.

Aside from public exchanges in speeches, interviews, communiques, and published correspondence, the United States made secret efforts to establish fruitful contacts with NVN. Various initiatives sponsored by third countries continued during 1966. Occasionally these produced a slight positive reaction from the communist side, giving rise to some hope of finally bringing the problems to the conference table. More often, however, the initiatives elicited little or no evidence that the enemy intended to change his stand.

Apparently the military successes scored by US, GVN, and FWMA forces in the last quarter of 1965 caused a change in the communist strategy. At conferences in December 1965, Hanoi's leaders reportedly developed a new politico-military

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strategy for conducting the war and for dealing with its international aspects. Militarily, the strategy called for maintaining a continuous threat by VC/NVA forces in RVN, avoiding combat except under favorable conditions, and then fighting only for limited objectives. The essence of this strategy would be to support a prolonged war of attrition. The objective would be to outlast the United States, and to convince the United States that it could not win militarily and must eventually settle on terms favorable to Hanoi. As part of this strategy, the war would be conducted without a specific timetable, negotiations would be avoided unless they could be conducted from a position based on significant military successes, and an effort would be made to limit the risks of an expanded war throughout Southeast Asia.¹

Understandably, then, the President's peace offensive and the continuing efforts of the United States to achieve a reasonable political settlement of the war were ineffective throughout 1966.

The President continued his efforts, however, because of growing opposition to the war at home and abroad. At home, US policy remained under attack by political and religious leaders, by important segments of the press and other news media, and by a large variety of vociferous quasi-official and private organizations. Many of these cast the United States in the role of an aggressor in Vietnam, and contended that the United States was not serious in trying to bring about a peaceful settlement. The President was particularly sensitive to and increasingly concerned by Congressional opposition to US policy toward Vietnam. Among officials of neutral and friendly governments, the lack of real understanding and appreciation of the US motives and of the nature of the communist aggression was more and more apparent. Pronouncements on the subject of a settlement in Vietnam by President de Gaulle of France and Prime Minister Ghandi of India were generally unsympathetic to the US position and served to cloud the issues and strengthen the resolve of the enemy.

1. (TS-GP 1) OJCS SEA CABIN Study Group, "Study of the Political-Military Implications in Southeast Asia of the Cessation of Aerial Bombardment and the Initiation of Negotiations (S)," 22 Nov 67, OJCS File, Vietnam Negotiations.

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The Role of the United Nations

At the same time that he announced renewal of bombing on 31 January, the President instructed Ambassador Goldberg to request an immediate meeting of the United Nations Security Council and to present for its consideration a draft US resolution, calling for immediate discussions, without pre-conditions, among the "appropriate interested governments." The purpose of these discussions would be to arrange a conference aimed at the application of the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962 and "the establishment of a durable peace in Southeast Asia."²

On 1 February the UNSC met to consider the US draft resolution. The government of NVN announced on the same day that any resolutions passed by the UNSC would be invalid since only the Geneva Conference was competent to deal with US military actions in Vietnam. The UNSC decided to put the Vietnamese question on its agenda by a vote of 9-2, the minimum majority necessary. It was obvious that there was substantial opposition to consideration of the question even though the majority had been obtained. The United States, realizing this fact, announced on 10 February that it would not press for UNSC action, and none was taken.³

Throughout 1966, the personal initiatives of UN Secretary General U Thant were more significant than attempts to discuss Vietnam in either the UNSC or General Assembly. On 9 March, the day after particularly heavy US bombing raids, Secretary General U Thant issued a strong appeal for the cessation of bombing. He said that he was deeply concerned over the escalation of the fighting in Vietnam. He stated that any move to bring the parties closer to negotiations must include cessation of the bombing of NVN, substantial reduction of all military activities in the RVN, and the participation of the NLF in any peaceful settlement.

2. (G-GP 4) JCS Hist Div, "Analysis of Public Statements by Officials of the US Government Concerning Conditions for Terminating Hostilities in Southeast Asia," 1 Apr 67 (hereafter cited as Historical Analysis of Statements).

3. Keesing's, 1965-1966, p. 21358.

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U Thant said at a press conference on 6 April that if peace was to be achieved, all parties had to accept the concept of a unified, independent, and nonaligned country guaranteed by all the major powers. In his view the UNSC could not be involved in the Vietnamese question because, of those directly involved, only the United States was a member of the UN. Hanoi was afraid that in the UNSC the 1954 Geneva Agreements would be diluted; and Communist China believed, rightly or wrongly, that there was a usurper holding its seat. It would therefore appear as an accused before "a jury one of the members of which was inimical."

In a speech on 24 May, U Thant again affirmed the three-point peace program he had put forward on 9 March, repeating that peace could only be restored by a return to the Geneva Agreements. He said that as a preparatory measure it would be necessary to "start scaling down" military operations and to agree to discussions that included "the actual combatants."⁴

Conditions for Negotiations

The United States continued to express its willingness to negotiate and continued to attempt to persuade the GVN to accept negotiations: On 5 February, President Johnson, the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, met in Honolulu with GVN leaders. Ambassador Lodge, Admiral Sharp, and General Westmoreland were also present. The RVN delegation was headed by General Thieu and Air Vice Marshal Ky. Although concerned primarily with economic matters and rural construction, the conference did result in a joint statement to the effect that both governments regretted "the total absence of a present interest in peace on the part of the Government of North Vietnam. . . . They agreed upon continued diplomatic efforts for peace."

In a separate document known as the Declaration of Honolulu the United States pledged to support free elections in RVN and to give full support to social reforms.

4. Keessing's, 1965-1966, pp. 21360 and 21767.

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The U.S. Government and the Government of Vietnam will continue in the future, as they have in the past, to press the quest for a peaceful settlement in every forum The peace offensive of the U.S. Government and the Government of South Vietnam will continue until peace is secured.

In a press conference in Honolulu, however, Thieu and Ky declared that they could not negotiate with or recognize the NLF and showed little enthusiasm for negotiations with NVN.⁵

Communist leaders had begun mentioning in rather insistent terms in late 1965 that the price the United States would have to pay for Hanoi's agreement even to talk about ways of ending the fighting was a complete halt in the bombing of NVN. On 24 January 1966 Ho Chi Minh sent letters to the governments of various nations, including Great Britain, France, Canada, and the communist countries, in which he laid down Hanoi's conditions for peace. He reiterated the four-point program he had first enunciated in April 1965, emphasizing especially that before negotiations could begin, the United States must withdraw all its troops from RVN, agree to negotiate with the NLF, and unconditionally end the bombing of NVN.⁶

Ending the bombing became the central theme of efforts to bring about some kind of talks between the United States/GVN and the enemy side. It was proposed with increasing frequency, especially by UN Secretary General U Thant. Even US officials came to speak of the bombing as a negotiable matter, under certain conditions. The Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed halting the bombing of NVN merely to secure agreement from the other side that it would negotiate. Throughout 1966 they continued to insist that the United States should rely more on forcing the communists to cease their aggression, rather than trying to persuade them to talk about it.

5. Keesing's, 1965-1966, p. 21359. (S) "Record of Conclusions and Decisions for Further Action, Honolulu Meeting, 23 Feb 66," Encl to (TS-GP 1) JCS 2343/783, 28 Feb 66, JMF 9155.3 25 Feb 66.

6. Keesing's, 1965-1966, p. 21356.

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The Chairman told a Senate Committee in late January that it would be both a military and political mistake to agree to end the bombing as a condition for peace talks. Militarily, it would allow the enemy to bring more pressure than ever to bear on the GVN. Politically, it would relieve the pressure on NVN to negotiate. He said that the United States held three military "blue chips" with regard to negotiation. These were the bombing of NVN, the deployment of US-FWMAF, and the withdrawal, under appropriate circumstances, of these forces. "If you permanently stop bombing North Vietnam," General Wheeler told the Committee, "in effect you throw one of your blue chips for negotiation over your shoulder."⁷

The US position on Hanoi's four conditions for peace was delineated by the Secretary of State before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 18 February. On the first point, elimination of the US military presence in RVN, the Secretary stated that the United States was prepared to withdraw its troops and dismantle its bases "once there is compliance with the Geneva accords by all parties." The United States could also agree with Hanoi's second point, relating to the clauses covering alliances and bases of the Geneva Agreements, under the same conditions. The fourth point specified by Hanoi provided that peaceful reunification be settled by the Vietnamese people without foreign intervention. The Secretary of State observed that the United States found this acceptable if it were "clearly understood that conditions must first be created both in the North and South that will make it possible for truly free elections to be held." It was on Hanoi's third point, however, that the "core of the Communist position" was disclosed. This point provided that "the internal affairs of South Viet-Nam must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves in accordance with the program of the National Liberation Front." This really meant that before the communists would "even condescend" to negotiate, the GVN must be overthrown; the NLF, "the creature and agent of Hanoi," must become the sole bargaining representative for the South Vietnamese people; and the RVN must be put under the control of a coalition government formed by the communists and from which the GVN would be excluded. Since these conditions were clearly

7. (U) Transcript of CJCS testimony before Senate Committee on Armed Services, 31 Jan 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Feb 66.

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opposed to the principles behind the US commitment to RVN, the implication was clear in the Secretary's testimony that the United States must reject them. Secretary Rusk did not address the matter of a bombing halt.⁸

Development of Public Opinion

The Secretary of State had spoken on the last day of special hearings on the war in Vietnam by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Senator Fulbright, Chairman of the Committee, was already becoming critical of US policy in Vietnam. While not yet positive the Administration's course was wrong, Fulbright recorded grave reservations. After these hearings--and possibly because of them--the trend of Congressional speeches and public opinion polls decidedly favored moderation and negotiation. On 19 February, Senator Robert Kennedy undertook what the New York Times termed a "dramatic policy break" with the Administration by suggesting that participation by the NLF in the GVN lay "at the heart" of any negotiated settlement. Ten days later, Senator Wayne Morse introduced a resolution to annul the Tonkin Gulf resolution. It was defeated by a vote of 92-5. During the debate, however, Senator Fulbright strongly pleaded for "accommodation" rather than expanded military action, and proposed an agreement with China for the neutralization of Southeast Asia as a solution to the conflict.⁹

The findings of a Stanford University poll, published in mid-March, indicated considerable public sympathy for the Kennedy-Fulbright suggestions. The sample supported negotiation with the NLF 88 percent to 8 percent, and favored VC participation in the GVN by 52 percent to 36 percent. Unilateral withdrawal was disapproved by 81 percent vs 15 percent, as was gradual disengagement by a margin of 56 percent vs 32 percent. Concerning possible escalations, 38 percent supported and 55 percent opposed any bombardment of North Vietnam's population centers; 45 percent would approve and 46 percent oppose the commitment of 500,000

8. (U) Statement, SecState to Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 18 Feb 66, quoted in Dept of State Bulletin, LIV (7 Mar 66), p. 354.

9. NY Times, 20 Feb 66, 2 Mar 66.

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troops. The survey's sponsors discerned in these results a pattern quite close to the position expounded by former Ambassador George Kennan, rejecting unilateral withdrawal but favoring the adoption of more flexible negotiating positions.¹⁰

The Buddhist rebellion against the GVN brought forth another burst of calls for reappraisal. James Reston believed the moral aspects of US actions had become paramount: "Our arms were provided to fight the aggressors and not to start a civil war. Our promise was to help South Vietnam not to destroy it." Senator Fulbright now judged that "we are . . . intervening in a civil war and our announced objectives are unattainable." Lecturing at Johns Hopkins, the Senator declared America was succumbing to "the arrogance of power" and detected "signs of that fatal presumption . . . which brought ruin to Ancient Athens, to Napoleonic France and to Nazi Germany." Senator Joseph Clark said the current unrest offered an opportunity "to get out with decency;" Senator Richard Russell spurned the domino theory and counselled withdrawal if a majority of Americans so indicated in an opinion poll.¹¹

Opinion surveys demonstrated a sharp decline in the degree of public support accorded to the Administration's policies. A mid-May Gallup poll reported that approval of the President's conduct of the war had for the first time fallen below 50 percent; 47 percent approved, 35 percent disapproved and 18 percent were without opinion. Concurrently, the Louis Harris Survey reported that the "good-to-excellent" rating given the President's overall performance stood at 55 percent, down twelve points from January.¹²

Proposals and Counterproposals--March-June

In the spring of 1966, mainly as a result of secret efforts by Canadian officials, Washington and Hanoi seemed for a time to be coming closer to an understanding. On 1 March, in a ceremony marking the fifth anniversary of the

10. NY Times, 15 Mar 66.

11. NY Times, 18 May 66, 5 Apr 66, 22 Apr 66, 29 Apr 66, 4 Jun 66, 26 Apr 66.

12. NY Times, 22 May 66.

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Peace Corps, President Johnson strongly urged renewed efforts to negotiate, and repeated the offer he had first made in April 1965 to include NVN in a "massive effort of reconstruction and development" in Southeast Asia.¹³

A special representative of the Canadian Government visited Hanoi in March to obtain an authoritative clarification of Hanoi's conditions for a negotiated settlement. He reported to the US Department of State that he had found NVN officials "all equally hard and uncompromising" in insisting that the United States accede to the four points and accept the NLF as the sole representative of the people of RVN. However, the Canadian official had detected a slight softening in Hanoi's position when he had talked with Pham Van Dong, Prime Minister of NVN. The Prime Minister had told the Canadian that Hanoi would be prepared to talk with the United States if the latter declared an unconditional and permanent halt to the bombing of NVN. Dong had asked that the Government of Canada convey to the United States the offer on the bombing halt. He had not linked the four points to the bombing halt nor had he discussed the role of the NLF in negotiations. Although he at first had agreed to furnish the Canadian official with an aide-memoire on talks following a permanent halt in bombing, he had later declined to do so, saying there had been a misunderstanding.¹⁴

On 12 April Secretary of State Rusk stated publicly that the United States "would be ready" to suspend its bombing of NVN as a step toward peace. A few days later Senator Mansfield proposed "a direct confrontation across a peace table." The meeting would include the United States, NVN, Communist China, and "essential elements from the RVN." Presumably, these essential elements would include both the GVN and the NLF. The US Ambassador to the United Nations noted publicly that President Johnson welcomed Mansfield's suggestion. On 22 April, however, Hanoi rejected the proposal, saying that "The hasty approval . . . by the Johnson government" was a "new peace trick" intended to "mislead world opinion, which condemns aggression, and to divert its attention from the intensification of the bombing of the Democratic

13. Dept of State Bulletin, LIV (21 Mar 66), pp. 441-43.

14. (S) Memo of Conversation, Ronning, Bundy et al., 20 Mar 66, Dept of State, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Mar 66.

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Republic of Vietnam." On 26 April Ho Chi Minh, addressing the North Vietnamese National Assembly, repeated his demands for a bombing halt and withdrawal of US/FWMAF.¹⁵

The United States did not consider an unconditional bombing halt. Since there did appear to be some hope for peace talks, however, in March and April the question of just what the United States would accept in return for a cessation of the bombing of the North came under intensive examination and discussion. On 4 May Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy said the issue had always been "whether we would trade a cessation of bombing in the North for some degree of reduction or elimination of Viet Cong and now North Vietnamese activity in the South, or a cessation of infiltration from the North or a combination of both."¹⁶

General Maxwell D. Taylor, now Special Consultant to the President, advised President Johnson on 27 April that because of "all the public discussion of our desire for negotiations," the US public would expect that hostilities would cease as soon as talks began. He cited the Korean negotiations that had dragged on for over two years, during which time the United States stayed on the "passive defensive" to avoid casualties while the enemy attacked at will. He believed that the United States and its allies had received more casualties than they would have had they retained the military initiative.

In Korea, the adversary had had no incentive to come to a prompt settlement. General Taylor believed this pitfall must be avoided in Vietnam. The enemy must be forced to the negotiation table convinced of the need for a prompt settlement, and military pressure must be kept on him until it was reached. He pointed to the danger that Hanoi might suddenly agree to negotiate, provided the United States permanently stopped its bombing of NVN. The US Government would be under great pressure at home and abroad to accept this precondition even though it would seriously prejudice the success of any negotiations.

15. Keesing's 1965-1966, p. 21766.

16. (S) Memo, AsstSecState for FE Affairs to SecState, 4 May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66.

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General Taylor argued for combining cessation of the bombing and of GVN/US offensive military operations in the RVN as a trade for the complete cessation of VC-NVA incidents and military operations in the South. He would then trade cessation of infiltration from the North for no further increases in US forces. Thereafter, negotiations could move to reciprocal withdrawals of forces. The last problem would be absorbing the remaining VC into the RVN under some sort of amnesty program.¹⁷

In a memorandum to the Secretary of State, Mr. Bundy stated that, although General Taylor's solution would be simple and easily verifiable, it would permit the enemy to set up "enclaves" in RVN and reinforce them so that they might become major bargaining counters for an explicit NLF role in the GVN. Mr. Bundy wanted the asking price for a bombing halt to include a declared cessation of infiltration into South Vietnam. He agreed with General Taylor that the United States should not cease bombing merely in return for enemy willingness to talk. Mr. Bundy recognized the pressures in this direction and suggested that US officials refrain from additional public statements which might highlight the issue and bring about the very pressures "we seek to avoid." There must be something tangible done by the other side in response to a US bombing halt and the United States should not consider another "pause" under existing circumstances. This was generally the line that was followed during the remainder of 1966.¹⁸

Meanwhile the feelers continued. On 27 May, after a visit to Hanoi, the Vice-Premier of Rumania informed the US Ambassador that NVN might accept cessation of bombing as a precondition for negotiations instead of insisting also on immediate withdrawal of US forces from the RVN. On 5 June Ambassador Goldberg summarized US peace negotiation proposals. "There should be a mutual cessation of all types of hostilities on all sides of the conflict; an end both to bombing and to infiltration" He called for a reconvening of the Geneva Conference to reaffirm the Geneva Accords and to

17. (S) Memo, GEN Taylor to Pres, "Assessment and Use of Negotiation Blue Chips," 27 Apr 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66.

18. (S) Memo, AsstSecState for FE Affairs to SecState, 4 May 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam May 66.

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"revitalize" them as a basis for peace in Southeast Asia. A State Department spokesman, commenting on the Ambassador's speech, made it clear that the United States did not envisage that a ceasefire should precede negotiations.¹⁹

In response to an intensification of the ground war in Vietnam, at a White House news conference on 18 June, President Johnson underscored US determination to persist "in our present policy. That policy is to bring to bear the ground, naval, and air strength required to achieve our objective. I must observe that this does not mean that we shall not increase our forces or our operations." He pointed to the great losses of the enemy in relation to US/GVN losses and the cost to NVN of air attacks by the United States. Referring to the recent domestic troubles of the GVN with the Buddhists, he warned that the United States would not let political differences with the GVN or domestic differences on policy affect its resolve, but would do whatever was necessary to insure RVN's freedom. The whole statement seemed to be a warning to the enemy not to count on US surrender in RVN.²⁰

On 21 June Mr. William Bundy met with Canadian officials to assess the results of a US initiative implemented the week before by the Canadian Government on behalf of the United States. This time the Canadian emissary had been given an "oral message" by the US Government to deliver to the government of North Vietnam. The statement had rejected any unilateral cessation of bombing by the United States without some tangible action by the enemy. It had been purposely vague, however, on the role of the NLF, and had not specified what action NVN must take with regard to the military

19. Keesing's, 1965-1966, p. 21767. Commenting on Goldberg's speech, Amb Lodge told SecState that he questioned the wisdom of a conference of the Geneva powers "except a pro forma one," and that he believed the US should avoid discussion of reunification elections as contemplated in the Geneva Agreements without first discussing the matter with the GVN. Amb Lodge also raised the general question of US major policy speeches that might be inconsistent with US commitments and suggested he be consulted before they were delivered. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 5351 to State, 7 Jun 66, JCS IN 25598.

20. Statement by Pres Johnson, 18 Jun 66, Dept of State Bulletin, LV (11)(Jul 66), pp. 42-43.

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activity in the South. In this respect it was more flexible than the US public position. The Canadian official found absolutely no "give" in the Hanoi position already stated; the DRV rejected as impossible any suggestion that it pay a price for a halt in US bombing of NVN. It was generally admitted that the mission had ended in failure, although NVN officials had expressed the wish that the Canadian channel be kept open for further communications.

The Canadian emissary also reported that the North Vietnamese were expecting the United States to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong. Canadian officials generally expressed concern that "any US action that tended to throw the North Vietnamese into the arms" of the CHICOMs would be disastrous. Mr. Bundy stated that the United States had no intention of bombing Hanoi or Haiphong or of mining Haiphong harbor.²¹

Interlude--July-September

Despite Mr. Bundy's statement to the Canadian officials, the United States had already decided on an escalation in the bombing that could be interpreted as bombing Hanoi and Haiphong. In reality, the new bombing that started on 29 June was confined to POL facilities on the outskirts of two cities. Nevertheless, a great wave of protest followed, including charges that the bombing had been directly aimed at NVN's most heavily populated areas and that heavy civilian casualties had been deliberately inflicted. These protests came from many quarters and created increased pressure on the United States to declare a bombing halt. One result was that any serious possibility of talks on negotiations was ended for the time being.

On 26 June the Secretary of State, speaking in Australia, said he saw no prospect for an early peace in Vietnam. On 30 June, in Omaha and Des Moines, the President again warned that attacks on military targets in NVN "will continue to impose a growing burden and a high price on those who wage war against the freedom of their neighbors." Once again, he called for peace talks.²²

21. (S) Dept of State Memo of Conversation, "Visit of Amb Ronning to Hanoi, June 14-17, 1966," 21 Jun 66; (S) Memo for Record, AsstSecState for FE Affairs, "Dinner Meeting with Paul Martin and Other Canadian Officials, June 21, 1966," 22 Jun 66; OECJCS File 091 Vietnam Jun 66.

22. Dept of State Bulletin, LV (25 Jul 66), p. 114.

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UN Secretary General U Thant expressed "deep regret" over the US bombing of the POL storage in the "heavily populated areas of Haiphong and Hanoi." He repeated his view that the first step in the search for peace should be an end to the bombing of NVN.

Replying to the Secretary General, Ambassador Goldberg defended the raids in a letter on 30 June. He stated that "repeated and increased efforts" by the US and other governments to bring about negotiations had been answered by NVN with an "increased tempo" in their military buildup and operations against RVN. US pilots, said the Ambassador, had taken great care to hit only military targets, but no such care was being taken by the Viet Cong in their terrorism and assassination of civilians in South Vietnam. He denied that a halt in the bombing of NVN would end the war, and declared that a peaceful solution could be found through the reconvening of the Geneva Conference.²³

In Washington, Senator Fulbright criticized the bombings sharply. It was significant, he said, that none of the NATO allies of the United States had supported the raids. He suggested that the raids appeared to mean that "the only solution we contemplate is the surrender of North Vietnam as the result of a complete military victory." Acting Secretary of State George Ball replied by stating that if Hanoi had responded in any encouraging way to Canada's diplomatic overtures the United States would have altered its pattern of military operations. He expressed the opinion that new pressures on NVN would "speed the move to the conference table."²⁴

In the House of Representatives, the escalation of the bombing prompted 16 Democrats to attack this "profoundly dangerous policy of brinkmanship" and to urge that the Administration return to "a policy of restraint." In the Senate, Mansfield and Robert Kennedy predicted the attacks would harden the enemy's will and delay peace efforts. Among Republicans, Senator Javits of New York pronounced himself "very unhappy" over the bombings; Vermont's Aiken darkly surmised that "some of the people advising the President want to get China into the war" Editorially, the

23. Keessing's, 1965-1966, p. 21768.

24. Ibid.

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New York Times declared that the United States had apparently committed itself to a quest for military victory: "But win what? A destroyed nation and a shattered people?" In the eyes of some, the "credibility gap" had grown to a yawning chasm. Recalling recent official explanations of why the scope of ROLLING THUNDER should not be expanded, James Reston remarked that the Administration "will probably never regain the confidence it has lost in its judgment and veracity." Having done everything he said he would not do, the President "has misled not merely his enemies, but his friends."²⁵

The Soviet Union charged that the bombings showed that US expressions of a desire for peaceful settlement were nothing but "empty words." The Soviet Government warned that it would aid NVN with "political and economic assistance and means of defense on the scale necessary" A hardening of the Soviet position was more evident in August. In early August, Belgian sources reported that the Soviet Military Attache in Belgium had stated, evidently intending the information to be passed to the United States, that the Soviet Government had studied President Johnson's statement of 18 June with great care and interest. The Soviet Union had decided that the United States position was that no negotiated settlement was possible in Vietnam. The Soviet Government intended, therefore, to greatly increase its support of NVN. This support would include shipment of more recent models of SAMs into NVN. The Soviet Attache warned that within two or three weeks the United States would be losing 20 aircraft a day over NVN.²⁶

The remainder of the summer produced few public statements or proposals on peace negotiations. As the summer progressed, however, the idea of an Asian conference to explore the restoration of peace in Vietnam gathered momentum. Early in June the Premier of Ceylon had asked the United States whether he could play a "useful role" in the Vietnamese situation. In reply, the State Department had asked the US Embassies in Saigon, Colombo, and Bangkok for comments on a proposal that the US suggest to the Ceylonese Premier that he call a meeting of Southeast Asian nations "to explore the restoration of peace in VN on the basis of the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Accords."

25. NY Times, 29 Jun 66 and 1 Jul 66.

26. Keessing's, 1965-1966, p. 21771. (S-NOFORN) USM-183-66 to CJCS, 10 Aug 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Aug 66.

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Noting the Premier's "generally friendly disposition to the Free World cause in Vietnam, and his concern about Communist inroads in Southeast Asia," the State Department believed that the Premier might be persuaded to propose a meeting including the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, in addition to the Buddhist states of Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and North and South Vietnam. This would take the question out of the context of a Buddhist meeting, which the United States wished to avoid, and make it a regional effort.²⁷

Ambassador Lodge in Saigon did not favor the idea. He concluded, "Unless there is prior indication that Hanoi is prepared to abandon its aggression in favor of an acceptable negotiated solution, it might be better to leave our exploration of possible routes to negotiations in quieter channels." In the general pessimism that came in June about the possibility of negotiations, the idea was dropped for the time being.²⁸

It was revived early in August by the Foreign Minister of Thailand. At the closing session of the Ministerial Conference of the Association of Southeast Asian States (ASA), composed of Thailand, Malaysia, and the Philippines, he proposed that the Asian nations take the lead in establishing negotiations for a peaceful settlement in Vietnam and called for an all-Asia conference. There was a generally disappointing reaction to the Thai initiative; only Japan expressed enthusiasm for the idea. On 18 August NVN denounced the proposed conference as "shop-worn merchandise" from President Johnson's "clique." On 24 August President Johnson publicly endorsed the proposal, but cautioned that "we do not want to make it appear that we are trying to direct it or force it."²⁹

27. (S-GP 3) Msg, State 3774 to Saigon (562 to Colombo, 2272 to Bangkok), 6 Jun 66, JCS IN 25360.

28. (S-GP 3) Msg, Saigon 5371 to State, 8 Jun 66, JCS IN 26909.

29. "Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam," SCom on Foreign Relations, Mar 68, 90th Cong, 2nd Sess (1968), pp. 31-32 (hereafter cited as "Background Information Relating to SE Asia and Vietnam," S.Com on Foreign Relations, Mar 68).

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The idea of an Asian conference did not get off the ground, but US officials recognized that the general theory of an Asian-sponsored settlement had substance and enjoyed considerable philosophical and emotional support. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, recognized that, in the event a peace conference materialized, the US Government would need a position on control mechanisms to insure observance of the agreement. Therefore, on 11 August 1966 he directed a Joint Staff study of the following issues:

1. The mission of an Asian Control Commission.
2. The membership desired.
3. A comparative analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed commission and the existing ICC.
4. Organization, manning, equipment, deployment, employment of an Asian commission.
5. Special problems posed by Japanese membership, especially Japanese constitutional questions and the impact on Japan's role in Asian security.³⁰

On 10 October the study was sent to the Secretary of Defense, along with a memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommending an interdepartmental study group to develop principles and guidelines for an effective inspection and verification system. The Secretary of Defense forwarded the JCS views to the Secretary of State on 11 November 1966. Mr. Rusk replied on 30 November, saying that the JCS recommendation was "timely and sound." He

30. (GP 3) CM-1672-66 to D/JS, 11 Aug 66, Encl to JCS 2339/230, 15 Aug 66, JMF 9150 (3 Aug 66).

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offered to appoint a Chairman for such a group and to designate several representatives to serve as members.³¹

New Peace Overtures

President Charles de Gaulle of France visited Cambodia from 30 August to 2 September. During his visit he talked with NVN representatives, and on 1 September delivered a major speech on Vietnam in which he castigated US policy and called for the United States to pledge withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam within a fixed period of time as a prelude to genuine international negotiations. In a joint communique with Prince Sihanouk, he also called for an end to the war in Vietnam, the withdrawal of all foreign troops, and the cessation of "all intervention."³²

The US reply to de Gaulle's statements marked the beginning of a new "peace offensive." In a speech on 5 September, President Johnson said that US troops would "come home" and their bases would be turned over for constructive peacetime purposes as soon as the "vicious aggression" stopped.

To all whom it may concern: If anyone will show me the time schedule when aggression and infiltration and might-makes-right will be halted, then I, as President of this country, will lay on the table the schedule for the withdrawal of all of our forces from Viet-Nam.

31. (~~TS~~-GP 1) JCSM-648-66 to SecDef, 10 Oct 66 (derived from JCS 2339/230-1); (~~S~~-GP 1) Ltr, SecDef to SecState, 11 Nov 66; (~~TS~~-GP 3) Ltr, SecState to SecDef, 30 Nov 66, Att to JCS 2339/230-3; JMF 9150 (3 Aug 66). When subsequently formed, this group included representatives from the Departments of State and Defense and ACDA, under the chairmanship of the Department of State. In September 1967 the group produced and circulated a study, "International Supervision of A Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Vietnam." (~~TS~~-GP 1) Dept of State Policy Planning Council, "International Supervision of a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in Vietnam," Att to JCS 2472/161, 29 Sep 67, JMF 911/305 (29 Sep 67).

32. Keesing's 1965-1966, p. 21636.

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On the same day Ambassador Goldberg stated:

We will go to Geneva, to Southeast Asia, or anywhere else where an honorable settlement can be negotiated. Our sole aim is to help secure for the people of South Viet-Nam the right to determine their own future free of external interference. When that one aim is accomplished, we are prepared to withdraw our troops.³³

In a speech at the United Nations on 22 September, Ambassador Goldberg also stated that the United States remained ready to negotiate without prior conditions.

We are prepared to discuss Hanoi's four points, together with any points which other parties may wish to raise. We are ready to negotiate a settlement based on a strict observance of the 1954 and 1962 Geneva agreements. . . . We will support a reconvening of the Geneva Conference or an Asian conference, or any other generally acceptable forum.

The United States, in order to remove any obstacles to the beginning of negotiations, was prepared to order a cessation of all bombing the moment it was assured, privately or otherwise, that a bombing halt would be answered promptly "by a corresponding and appropriate deescalation on the other side." The United States stood ready to withdraw its forces "as others withdraw theirs" under effective supervision. As to the place of the Viet Cong in any negotiations, Ambassador Goldberg said that the President had made clear that this was not an "insurmountable problem." He concluded by saying that the US position was not inflexible. In the next month both he and President Johnson followed this same line in several other major speeches. On 24 September, however, both NVN and Communist China categorically rejected the US proposals.³⁴

Other efforts to bring about talks included an experimental cessation of the military activities that had been authorized in the DMZ since July 1966. On 27 September, in

33. (S-GP 4) Historical Analysis of Statements, p. 23.

34. Dept of State Bulletin, LV (10 Oct 66), pp. 518-21. "Background Information Relating to SE Asia and Vietnam," S. Com on Foreign Relations, Mar 68, p. 32.

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response to an ICC request of 19 August, GVN and US forces suspended all military activities in the eastern half of the DMZ. The United States had agreed to the cessation as a first step "in reciprocal actions leading toward effective supervision and verified cessation of all military activity throughout the DMZ." The ICC reestablished its own controls in the eastern portion of the southern half of the DMZ on 28 September, but repeated efforts to enter the northern sector were rebuffed by NVN. The US position on the suspension was "not just to permit ICC patrols in our areas, but more importantly to test NVN willingness to cease its own activities and infiltration." There was no evidence that NVN intended to cooperate with the ICC, so on 13 October the United States and the GVN resumed military activity in the DMZ.³⁵

On 6 October the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. George Brown, also put forward new proposals for peace. He announced that Great Britain, as co-chairman (with the Soviet Union) of the Geneva Conference, was ready to reconvene the Conference at any time. He said that he saw no reason why the NLF could not be represented at the Conference, since the United States had said that the question of the NLF was not "an insurmountable problem." He proposed that if the principle of holding a conference was accepted by both sides, the United States should stop bombing NVN, and both sides should cease sending men and supplies into RVN. As soon as practicable both sides would halt aggressive action in the South. He proposed a political settlement based on the Geneva Accords of 1954, involving free elections, a general amnesty, neutralization of RVN and NVN, simultaneous withdrawal of outside forces from RVN, and a strengthening of the ICC.

Both the GVN and NVN rejected Brown's proposals. Saigon objected to separate NLF representation, although a GVN spokesman said his government would not object to the NLF being represented as part of a NVN delegation. Hanoi stated that Brown was mistaken in believing that a new Geneva Conference was urgent. "What is urgent is for the people of the whole world to demand that the United States should end its aggression."

35. (S-GP 3) Jt State-Def Msg 50755 to Saigon, 20 Sep 66, JCS IN 23550. (S) Msg, State 60469 to Saigon, 6 Oct 66, JCS IN 50296. (S-GP 3) Jt State-Def Msg 60493 to Saigon, 6 Oct 66, JCS IN 50154. (S-GP 4) Msg, JCS 5233 to CINCPAC, 13 Oct 66.

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The Soviet Union commented that Brown's plan was unacceptable because "it puts the aggressor and the victim on an equal footing." The British Foreign Secretary met with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko in New York on 8 and 11 October and subsequently flew to Moscow for further discussions with Mr. Gromyko and Premier Kosygin in mid-November, but in the end nothing came of the UK initiative.³⁶

The Manila Conference

The suggestion of an Asian conference to deal with the problem in Vietnam, first proposed in the summer, culminated in October in an Asian "summit conference" cosponsored by the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand. President Johnson accepted an invitation to attend on 27 September, and went to the conference on 24-25 October in Manila. The leaders of seven nations participated in the talks: South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, South Vietnam, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States--all nations fighting as allies in South Vietnam. The purpose of the conference, as stated by President Marcos of the Philippines, was to review the military situation in the RVN, and to "stress the non-military, economic, and political situation and programmes being carried forward by the South Vietnamese Government, together with a review of the prospects for a peaceful settlement of the conflict."³⁷

It will be recalled that in a draft memorandum for the President, the Secretary of Defense, ten days prior to the Manila Conference, had expressed certain views on ROLLING THUNDER to which the Joint Chiefs of Staff had objected. In this same draft memorandum the Secretary apparently intended to advise the President that a bombing halt could be used as a "carrot to induce negotiations." The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not agree that this was so and had informed the Secretary on 14 October.

Our experiences with pauses in bombing and resumption have not been happy ones. Additionally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that the likelihood of the war

36. Keesing's, 1965-1966, p. 21774.

37. Keesing's, 1965-1966, p. 21719.

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being settled by negotiations is small; and that, far from inducing negotiations, another bombing pause will be regarded by North Vietnamese leaders, and our Allies, as renewed evidence of lack of US determination to press the war to a successful conclusion. The bombing campaign is one of the two trump cards in the hands of the President (the other being the presence of US troops in SVN). It should not be given up without an end to the NVN aggression in SVN. As to maintaining contacts with NVN and the USSR in order to find ways to end the war, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agree; however, they advocate that US personnel involved should reflect a quiet determination to prosecute the war until communist aggression against SVN ceases.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that the military situation in South Vietnam had improved considerably over the past year, owing in no small measure to the success of ROLLING THUNDER operations. "The demands of communist leaders and leftist sympathizers for cessation of bombing give strong indications of the impact the bombing is having on the North Vietnamese." They continued:

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also agree that the enemy strategy appears to be to wait it out; in other words, communist leaders in both North and South Vietnam expect to win this war in Washington, just as they won the war with France in Paris. In this regard, the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that there is reason for such expectations on the part of the communist leadership.

They concluded by saying that they believed the war was at the stage where decisions over the next 60 days might determine the outcome. Therefore they would give their "unequivocal" views on the search for peace:

The frequent, broadly-based public offers made by the President to settle the war by peaceful means on a generous basis, which would take from NVN nothing it now has, have been admirable. Certainly, no one--American or foreign--except those who are determined not to be convinced, can doubt the sincerity, the generosity, the altruism of US actions and objectives. In the opinion of the Joint Chiefs of Staff the time has come when further overt actions and offers on our part are not only nonproductive, they are counterproductive. A logical case can be made that the American people, our Allies, and our enemies alike are increasingly uncertain as to our resolution to pursue the war

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to a successful conclusion. The Joint Chiefs of Staff advocate the following:

- (1) A statement by the President during the Manila Conference of his unswerving determination to carry on the war until NVN aggression against SVN shall cease;
- (2) Continued covert exploration of all avenues leading to a peaceful settlement of the war; and
- (3) Continued alertness to detect and react appropriately to withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from SVN and cessation of support to the VC.³⁸

The Manila Conference ended with the publication of a joint communique on South Vietnam, a "Declaration on Peace and Progress in Asia and the Pacific," and a "Declaration on Goals of Freedom." In the joint communique, the United States joined its six allies in pledging to continue the fight as long as necessary and with enough power to meet any communist challenge, while at the same time seeking a "just peace" through negotiations or reciprocal actions by each side to reduce the violence. They declared that allied forces would be withdrawn from RVN "after close consultation, as the other side withdraws its forces to the north, ceases infiltration, and the level of violence thus subsides. Those forces will be withdrawn as soon as possible and not later than six months after the above conditions have been fulfilled."

The other important points in the communique concerned actions to be taken by the GVN: 1) to provide a substantial share of the forces needed for a clear-and-hold action to regain territory from the Viet Cong and the loyalty of the population of such territory; 2) to continue fighting inflation, to begin planning for a postwar economy, and especially to prepare for the conversion of military bases to civilian use; 3) to finish writing a new constitution before March 1967, and to hold village and hamlet elections early in that year and elections for a "representative" national government before September 1967; and 4) to expand social welfare programs and to provide more electricity and water, better schools and health facilities, and more training for refugees, as well as essential agricultural reforms.

The "Declaration on Goals of Freedom" stated the objectives of the conferees.

38. (PS-GP 3) JCSM-672-66 to SecDef, 14 Oct 66 (derived from draft circulated by CJCS), JMF 9155.3 (14 Oct 66).

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We, the seven nations gathered in Manila, declare our unity, our resolve, and our purpose in seeking together the goals of freedom in Vietnam and in the Asian and the Pacific areas.

1. To be free from aggression.
2. To conquer hunger, illiteracy, and disease.
3. To build a region of security, order, and progress.
4. To seek reconciliation and peace throughout Asia and the Pacific.

These goals were spelled out in more detail in the third document of the conference, the "Declaration on Peace and Progress in Asia and the Pacific."³⁹

North Vietnam and Communist China immediately denounced the "so-called proposal for the removal of forces" from Vietnam as "out-and-out blackmail and shameless humbug," adding that the Manila proposals were aimed at "asking the Vietnamese people to surrender to the U.S. aggressors outright."⁴⁰

In October and November US officials frequently repeated the US conditions for peace in Vietnam. Before going to Manila the President had said:

Again and again and again I have said: we are ready to stop the bombing of North Viet-Nam; we are ready to produce a schedule for the withdrawal of our troops--whenever the other side tells us what it is prepared to do to move toward peace in Viet-Nam and to reciprocate the actions and the decisions that we take.

. . . And we do not seek the unconditional surrender of those who oppose us in Viet-Nam,

39. Dept of State Bulletin, LV (14 Nov 66), pp. 730-735.

40. Keesing's, 1965-1966, p. 21722.

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nor to destroy or change any system of government, nor to deprive any people of what is rightfully theirs. When a decision is made by the other side to seek its goals through peaceful means--not through terror, not through violence--we shall be the first to meet at the conference table.

The point that was made constantly was that the United States was more than willing to take steps toward peace, specifically by ending the bombing of NVN, but only if the enemy showed some willingness to give something in return. The condition for a cessation of the bombing was not specified, but it was generally understood to be a cessation or diminution of infiltration from the North, or some other tangible reduction in the violence of the ground war in South Vietnam. The United States, said Ambassador Goldberg on 25 October, "is willing to take the first step toward deescalation of the war by ordering a prior end to all bombing of North Viet-Nam the moment we are assured that there would be a response toward peace from North Viet-Nam."

On his return from Asia on 4 November, President Johnson said at a White House news conference: "If they want us to stop bombing, we ought to see what they are willing to stop. We will be glad to carefully consider anyone's proposals that represent two-way streets. We don't want to talk about just half of it, though."

By mid-November the public statements of US officials on the subject of peace negotiations reflected pessimism about the willingness of the communists to negotiate. Secretary Rusk said on 18 November in response to a question about prospects for a Christmas truce in Vietnam:

We have not been able to get indications from the other side as to what would happen if the bombing were stopped. We have tried almost literally every week since last January to get an answer to that question. And so I would not want to hold out the expectation that a prolonged pause in the bombing might occur.⁴¹

⁴¹. (U) JCS Hist Div Study, "Statements on US Cessation of Bombing," n.d.

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Thus, by November, the positions of both sides were clear. The United States would cease its bombing of NVN as a condition for peace negotiations if NVN would take some reciprocal action. Hanoi wanted an unconditional end to the bombing. The positions had remained unchanged for some time, and there did not seem to be much hope for accommodation in the near future.

Public opinion, both at home and abroad, had undoubtedly influenced the US Government to make almost constant efforts to bring about negotiations in 1966. Support for the President's policy in Vietnam had fallen significantly as the year progressed. War weariness and increasing impatience at home seemed to be among Mr. Johnson's chief problems. Although divided as to means, "hawks" and "doves" were agreed upon the end--a quick and satisfactory solution to the war. "Hawks" were apparently in the ascendancy; most Congressmen newly elected in 1966 declared themselves in favor of the escalations required to "win." However, public opinion polls also recorded substantial support for any action--either escalation or the reverse--that promised to be decisive. For example, the Harris poll indicated that public confidence in the Administration's war policies rose to 49 percent in October, following the Manila Conference; by December, this had declined to 42 percent. The President's problem, then, was plain; he must either gain an acceptable peace in the near future or face a further erosion of public confidence and support.⁴²

The Christmas and New Year Truce Periods--1966-1967

As the end of the year approached, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, mindful of their experience at the end of 1965, took such actions as they could to reduce the probable ill effects of the expected curtailment of military operations during the coming Christmas, New Year, and Tet seasons. Although they opposed holiday curtailments in principle, the Joint Chiefs of Staff expected that higher authority would direct a reduction in military actions during these periods. Therefore, they began in late November efforts to influence arrangements for the duration and nature of these periods of truce. General Wheeler, on 18 November, informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Pressures for a stand-down of military operations in Vietnam during

⁴². NY Times, 6 Dec 66 and 7 Dec 66.

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the Christmas and TET holidays are already beginning, and I am convinced that some sort of cease fire during this period is inevitable." He suggested that the Joint Chiefs of Staff take the initiative by proposing to the Secretaries of State and Defense arrangements that would have the least adverse impact upon US military activities.⁴³

During the next few days the Joint Chiefs of Staff discussed the provision that should be included in any truce arrangements to avoid a repetition of the military disadvantages that US/FWMAF/RVNAF forces had experienced during the 1965/1966 truce periods. These provisions included restricting the length of any stand-down to 48 hours duration, continuation during the stand-down of all air activities in Laos, and a stipulation that CINCPAC could strike any unusually large or lucrative or threatening military targets in NVN which might develop as a result of the stand-down. In order to enhance the friendly military position both before and after any stand-down, the Joint Chiefs of Staff also wanted a sharp increase in the intensity, and if possible, the scope of ROLLING THUNDER both prior to and immediately after the truce periods. All of these provisions were included in their recommendations to the Secretary of Defense. A position paper intended to be sent to the President by the Secretaries of State and Defense on the matter of a possible Christmas stand-down was prepared by the Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA). This paper included all of the JCS recommendations except those which would authorize CINCPAC to strike certain targets in NVN and which would provide for a sharp increase in ROLLING THUNDER before and after the truce.⁴⁴

General Wheeler told Assistant Secretary McNaughton that the Joint Chiefs of Staff did not consider their proposal for increased intensity of ROLLING THUNDER to be of major importance but that they were convinced that CINCPAC should be allowed to strike targets in NVN which were especially lucrative or threatened his forces. An example of such a target would be a SAM missile unit moving south toward the DMZ. The

43. (~~TS~~-GP 3) Draft CM-1928-66 to SecDef (Rev), Att to (~~TS~~-GP 3) CM-1940-66 to CNO et al., 21 Nov 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 66.

44. (~~TS~~-GP 3) CM-1940-66 to CNO et al., 21 Nov 66, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Nov 66. (~~TS~~) Ltr, CJCS to ASD(ISA), 22 Nov 66, same file.

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Chairman asked that Mr. McNaughton modify the proposed letter to the President to that extent at least.⁴⁵

As it had in the previous year, the NLF on 25 November forced the US hand by announcing that its forces would observe a 48-hour truce from 0700 24 December to 0700 26 December for Christmas and from 0700 31 December to 0700 2 January for the New Year. The Secretary of State immediately instructed Ambassador Lodge to talk with Prime Minister Ky and officials of the other nations involved and reach an agreed position on truce arrangements. It was obvious from the content of his instructions that US authorities had accepted the JCS views. Ambassador Lodge was informed that current plans called for not stopping air activities in Laos, and that "we are considering emergency waiver authority to strike any targets in NVN which pose immediate and direct threat to our forces." If the GVN could be induced to agree, the truce periods should be no longer than 48 hours. Mr. Rusk assured Ambassador Lodge that he did not foresee any extensions of the bombing pause, such as had taken place in the previous holiday periods, in the absence of "the same clear indications of timely and appropriate reciprocal action by Hanoi on which we have insisted publicly and privately throughout the last ten months." Nor would there be any extension of truce in RVN. Secretary Rusk stated that the United States intended to take the same general position with respect to the Tet holiday. The Secretary of State suggested that the GVN incorporate all three holidays in its announcement, which would become the official announcement of the Allied position.⁴⁶

Ambassador Lodge notified the Department of State on 29 November that the GVN had agreed to the US views on the holiday periods and would announce on 30 November that it, and the associated nations would take no offensive military actions at Christmas, from 0700 24 December 1966 to 0700 26 December 1966; at New Years from 0700 31 December 1966 to 0700 2 January 1967; and at the Lunar New Year (Tet) from 0600 8 February 1967 to 0600 12 February 1967.⁴⁷

45. (S) Ltr, CJCS to ASD(ISA), 22 Nov 66, same file.
46. (S) Jt State-Def Msg 91750 to Saigon, 26 Nov 66,
JCS IN 54500.
47. (S) Msg, Saigon 12006 to State, 29 Nov 66, JCS
IN 57743.

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On 4 December the Joint Chiefs of Staff gave CINCPAC his instructions for the Christmas stand-down, using as a basis the policy set forth in the State-Defense message of 26 November. Military operations in RVN and NVN would be curtailed during the period specified in the GVN announcement, but units would not break contact in RVN and would respond if "enemy initiatives" placed them in danger. No offensive air operations would be mounted in RVN except as necessary to protect friendly forces, in which case the use of naval and ARC LIGHT forces might be authorized. MARKET TIME and GAME WARDEN would continue. All armed reconnaissance, air strikes, and NGF would be suspended in NVN during this period, although CINCPAC was authorized to order strikes against NVN targets that posed an immediate and direct major threat to US forces, specifically SAMs moving southward toward the DMZ. Operations in Laos would continue as normal. Whenever US commanders believed their forces to be in danger they could resume any or all military actions. CINCPAC was also informed that instructions for New Years and Tet would follow separately.⁴⁸

It thus appeared that the Joint Chiefs of Staff, by taking an early initiative in the matter, had managed to have written into the instructions for the holiday periods of 1966-1967 safeguards that had not been present in those of 1965-1966.

During the Christmas stand-down, the enemy violated the truce in RVN on 101 separate occasions, killing 3 US soldiers and wounding 27 others. The RVNAF suffered 27 killed and 27 wounded. The enemy lost 26 killed.⁴⁹

NVN made maximum use of this relaxation of pressures to resupply its forces. Sightings of waterborne logistic craft, including large, steel-hulled cargo carriers in the SEA DRAGON area, during the 48-hour period equalled those for the first two months of SEA DRAGON operations.⁵⁰ General Westmoreland, noting the enemy's major effort to move

48. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 9510 to CINCPAC, 4 Dec 66.

49. (TS-NOFORN-GP 1) CINCPAC Command History, 1966, pp. 487-488.

50. Ibid.

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supplies and men southward, called for authority to thwart any such effort during the New Year truce period. He said that

unless directed otherwise, we intend to react (using VNAF aircraft if practicable) to such overt re-supply activities which fulfill the following criteria: A) The activity is taking place in a known, well-established enemy base area. B) Supplies are being unloaded in sufficient quantities to indicate major re-supply operations. C) The re-supply is taking place in enemy base areas in close proximity to friendly units and/or installations, and hence, constitute a future threat to friendly forces.

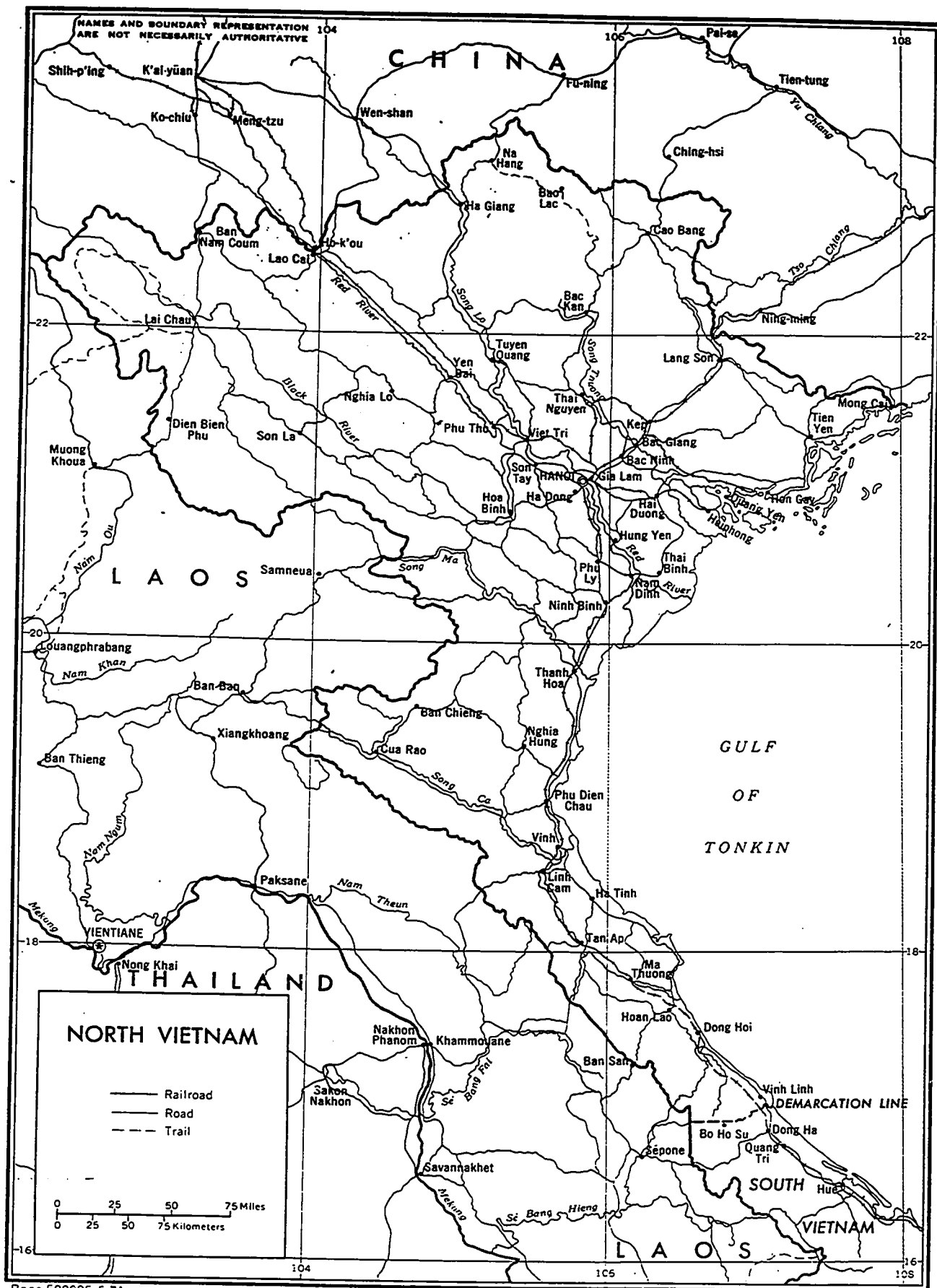
He was strongly backed by CINCPAC.⁵¹

The execute message for the New Year ceasefire had already been dispatched along the same lines as earlier instructions for Christmas. Nevertheless, after receiving the agreement of the State and Defense Departments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized COMUSMACV to take actions against enemy resupply activities as he had proposed, but specified that these activities must constitute a "direct," not a "future" threat to friendly forces.⁵²

51. Ibid. (TS) Ltr ASD(ISA) to Chmn, Dept of State Policy Planning Council, 30 Dec 66; (TS-GP 3) Msg, CINCPAC to JCS, 290647Z Dec 66, JCS IN 18976, OCJCS File 091 Vietnam Dec 66.

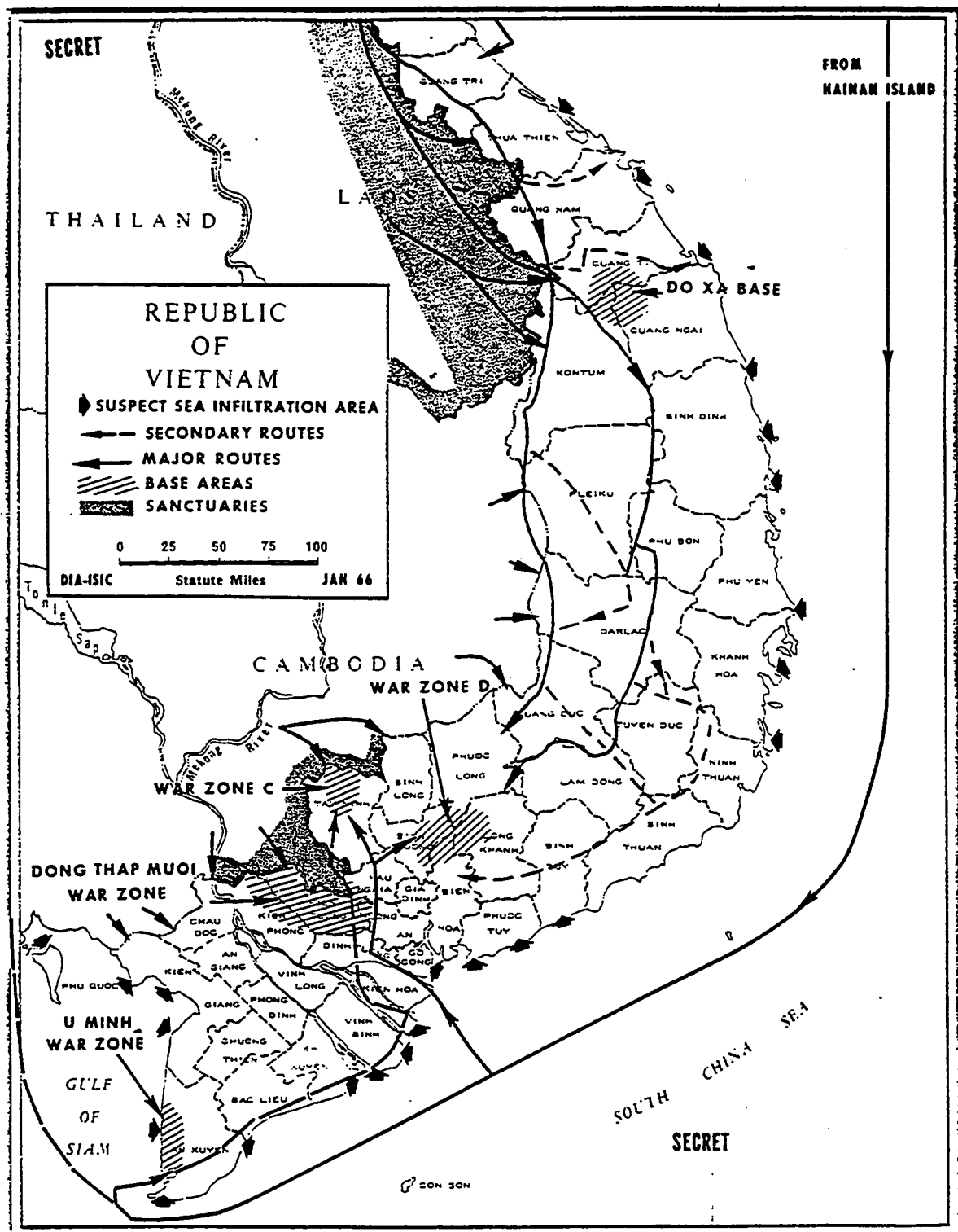
52. Ibid. (TS-GP 3) Msg, JCS 2481 to CINCPAC, 30 Dec 66.

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1965-1966
VIET CONG SUPPLY AND INFILTRATION ROUTES



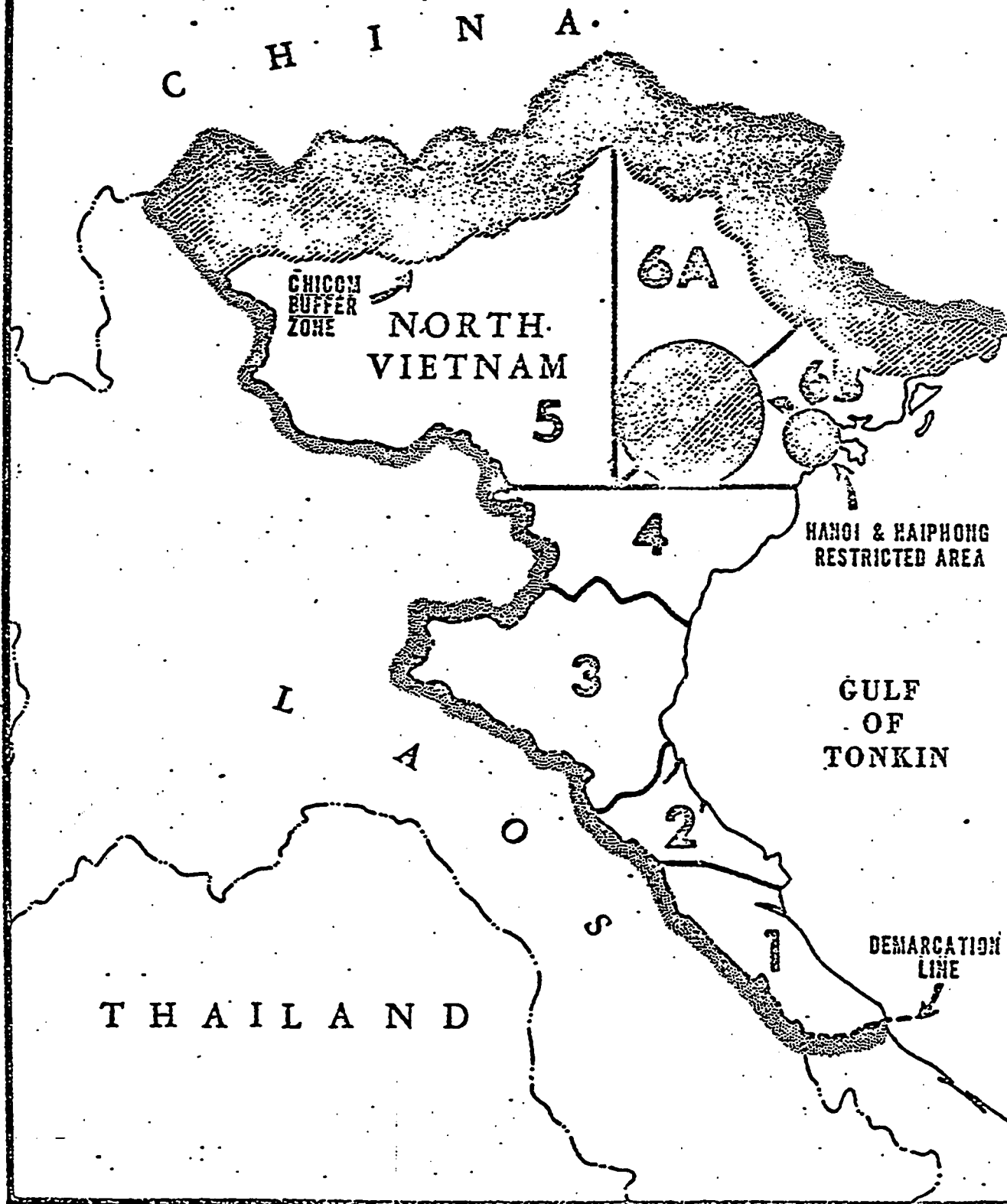
Map III

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ROLLING THUNDER

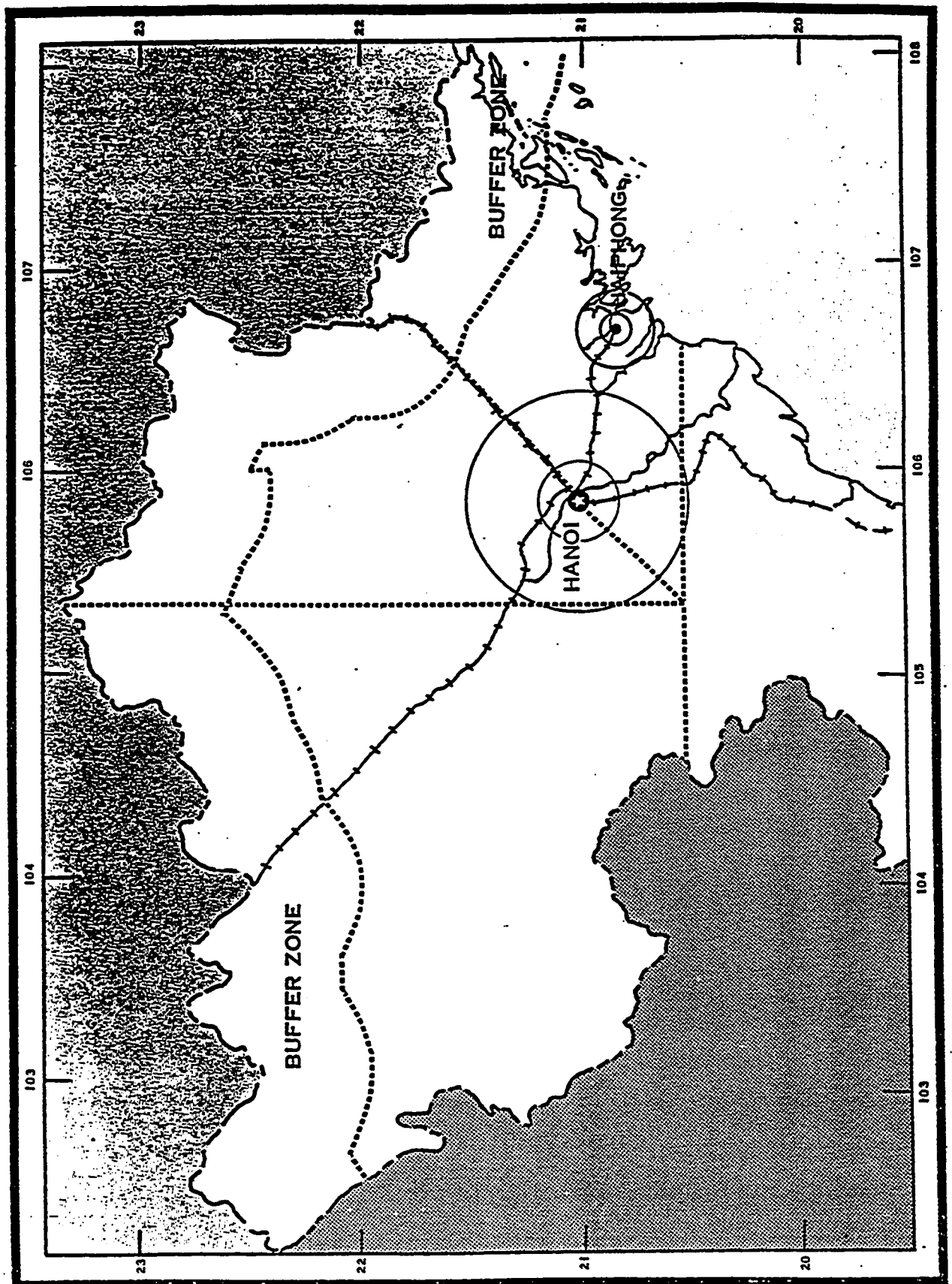
NORTH VIETNAM ARMED RECONNAISSANCE ROUTE PACKAGE AREAS



Map IV

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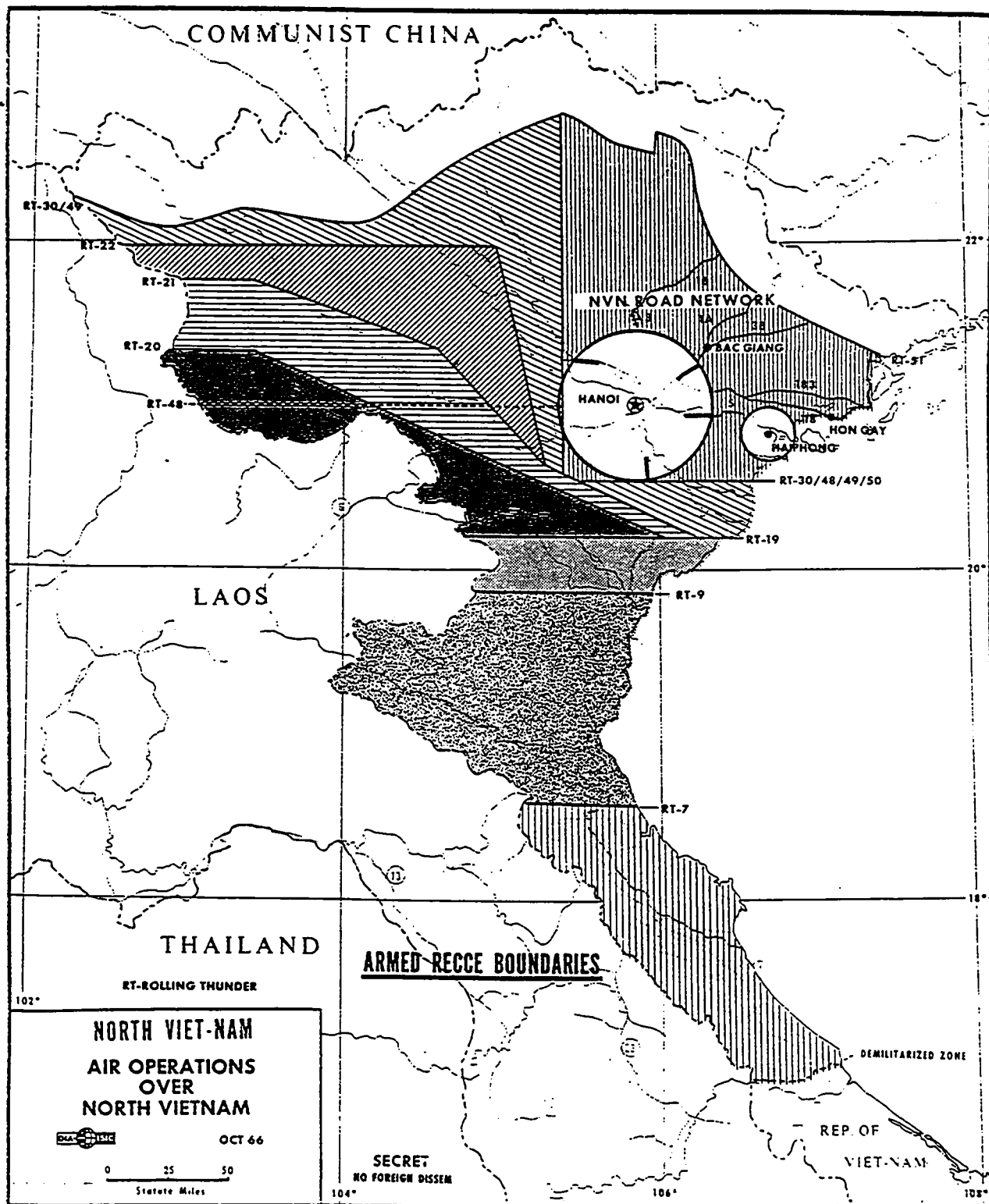
NORTHERN NVN (with sanctuary areas)



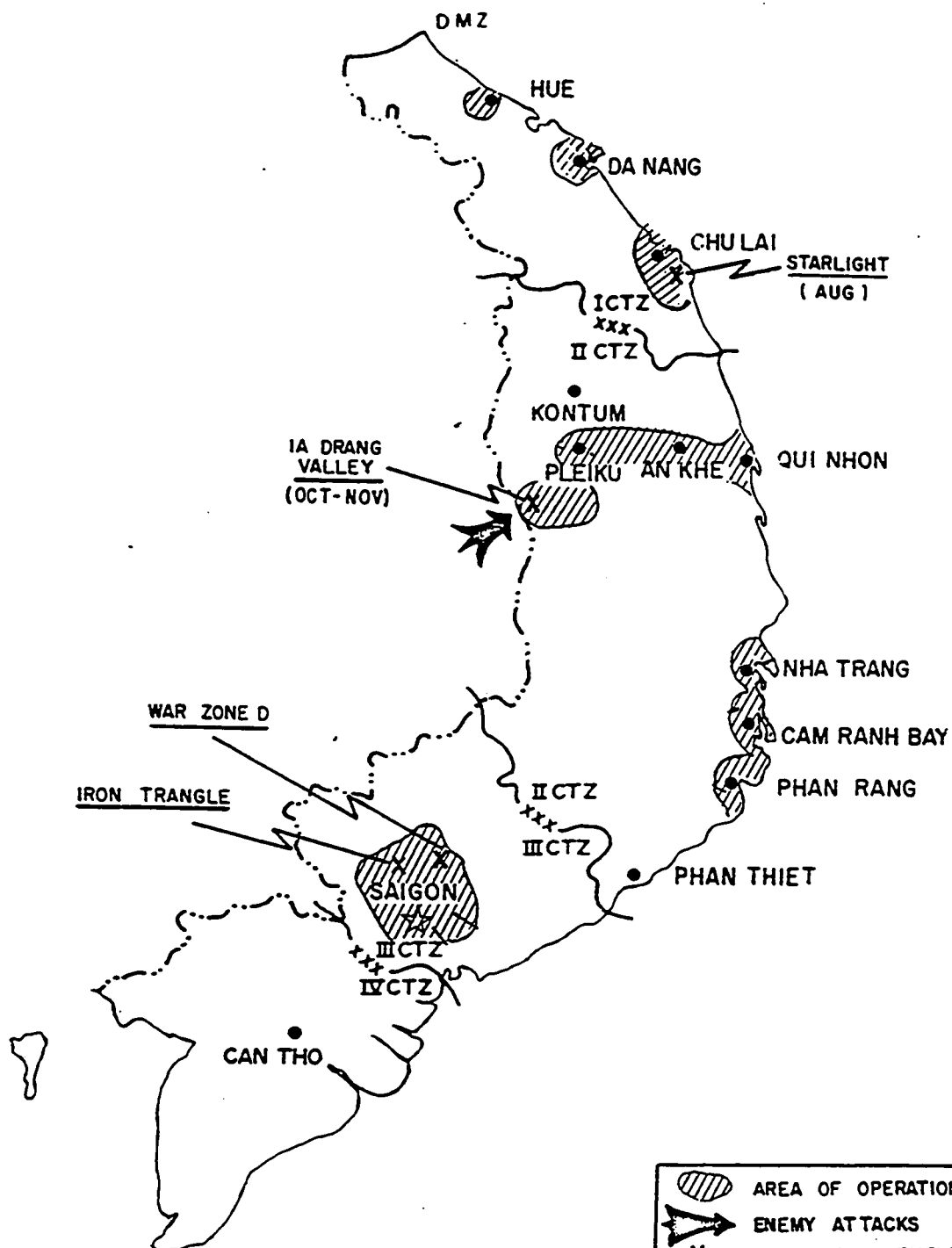
MAP V

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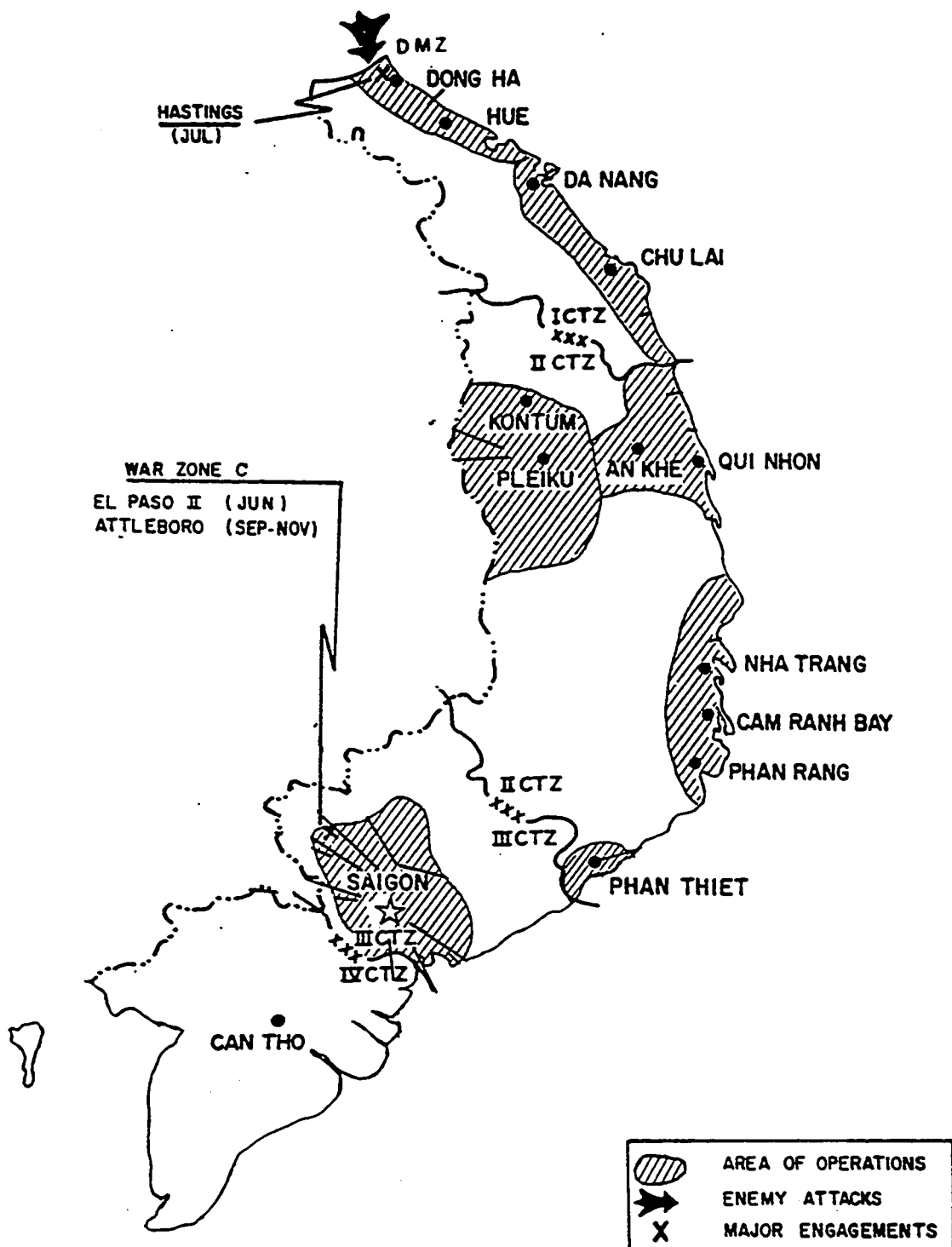
ROLLING THUNDER
Armed Recce Boundaries through RT 51



MAP VI

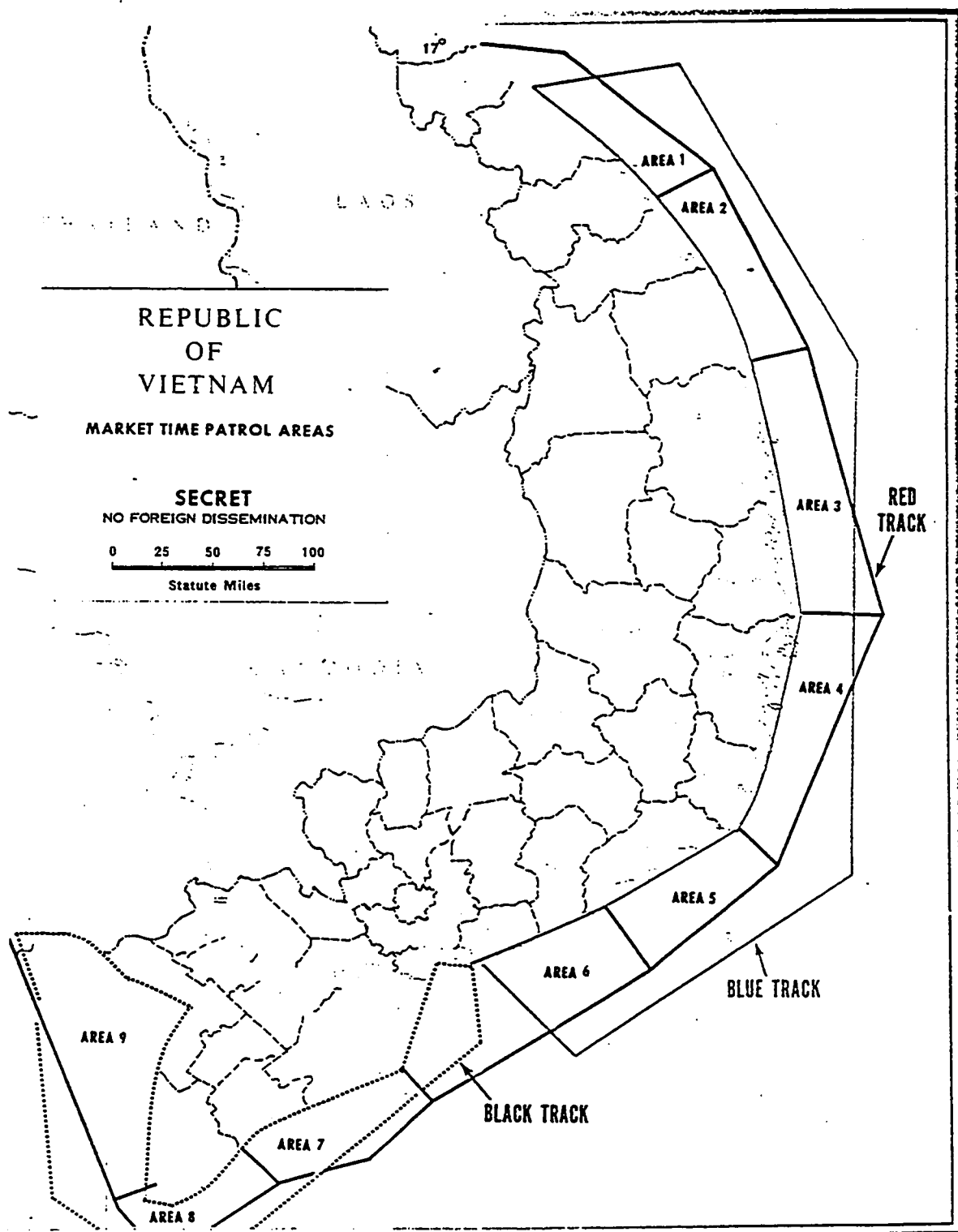


AREAS OF OPERATION OF MAJOR
US/FW UNITS
1965



AREAS OF OPERATION OF
 MAJOR US/FW UNITS
 1966

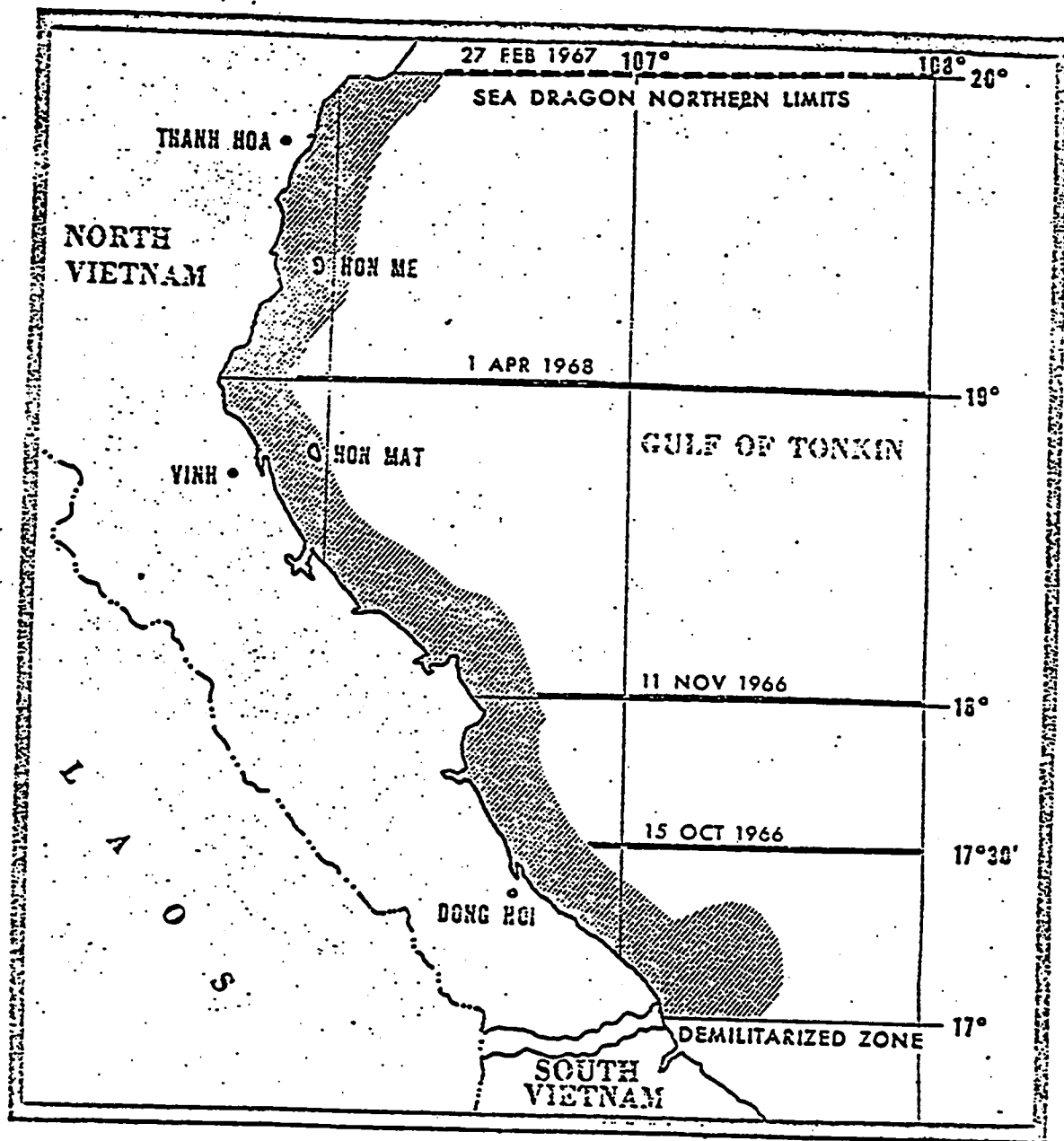
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MAP IX

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SEA DRAGON OPERATION AREAS



Map X